The NES Omnibus

THE NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM & ITS GAMES

Volume 2 M-Z

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

BRETT WEISS

VOLUME 2

The NES Omnibus

THE NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM & ITS GAMES

Volume 2 M-Z

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

BRETT WEISS

VOLUME 2

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING
4880 Lower Valley Road • Atglen, PA 19310

Copyright © 2021 by Brett Weiss

Library of Congress Control Number:
2020930944

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying or information storage and retrieval systems—without written permission from the publisher.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book or any part thereof via the Internet or any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials.

"Schiffer," "Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.," and the pen and inkwell logo are registered trademarks of Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Edited by Ian Robertson
Designed by Molly Shields
Cover design by Justin Watkinson

Type set in Compacta Bd BT/Times New Roman

ISBN: 978-0-7643-6248-4
Printed in China

Published by Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.
4880 Lower Valley Road
Atglen, PA 19310
Phone: (610) 593-1777; Fax: (610) 593-2002
E-mail: Info@schifferbooks.com
Web: www.schifferbooks.com

For our complete selection of fine books on this and related subjects, please visit our website at www.schifferbooks.com. You may also write for a free catalog.

Schiffer Publishing's titles are available at special discounts for bulk purchases for sales promotions or premiums. Special editions, including personalized covers, corporate imprints, and excerpts, can be created in large quantities for special needs. For more information, contact the publisher.

We are always looking for people to write books on new and related subjects. If you have an idea for a book, please contact us at proposals@schifferbooks.com.

This book is dedicated to Shane Stein. Not only is he a good friend, a terrific writer, and a devoted family man, but he's been super supportive of my writing career, my YouTube channel, and the retro-gaming community in general. He's at the top-tier level on my Patreon page, he's contributed essays and stories to several of my books, and he's given me some much-needed financial advice. Plus, he's fun to hang out with. Best of all, he's simply a fine human being.

RETROGAMER PUBLISHING

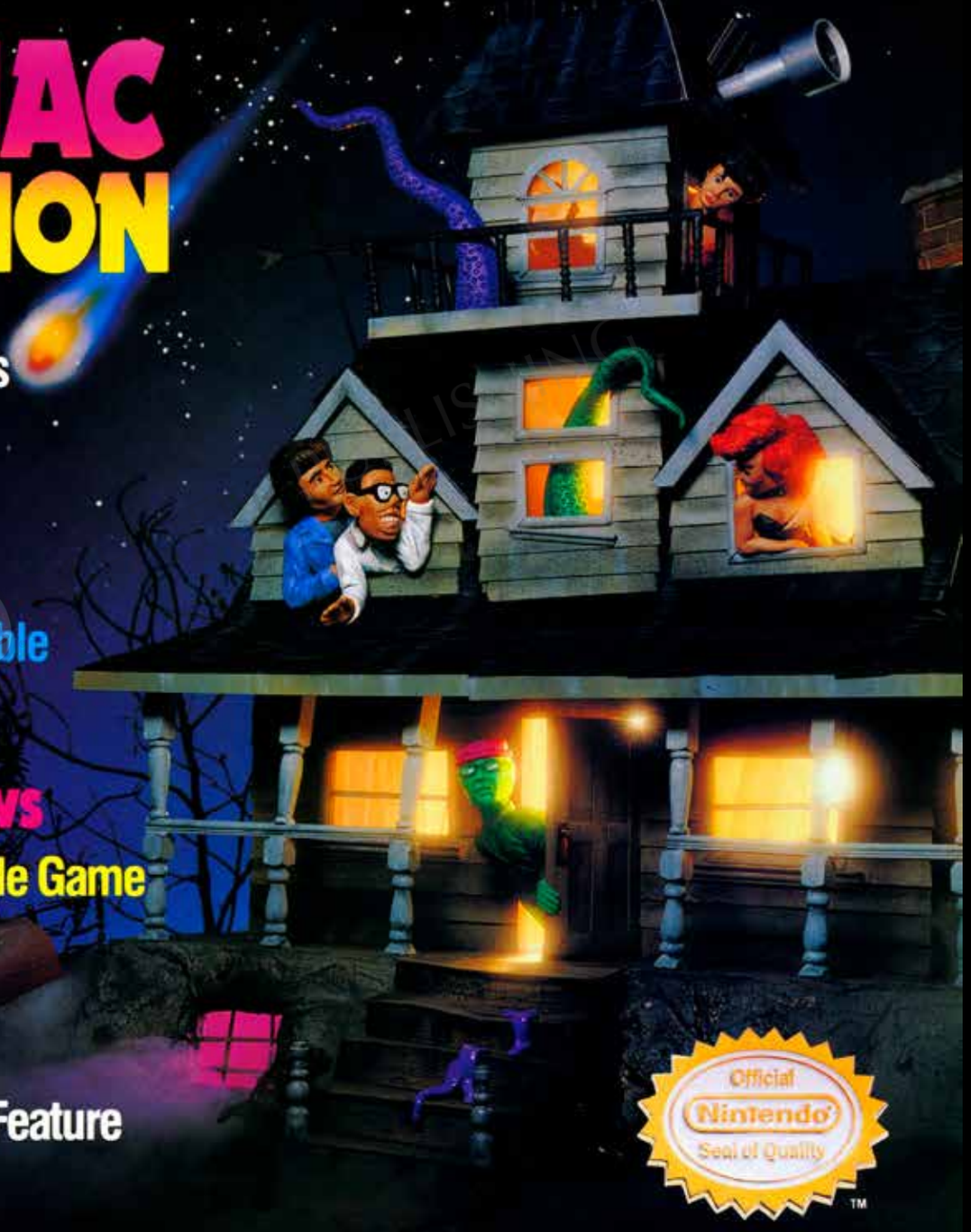
The Weiss family: Ryan, Charis, Katie, and Brett.

NINTENDO POWER™

VOLUME 16
U.S. $3.50 Canada $4.50

MANIAC MANSION

Weirdos, Heroes and Space Cadets



Don't Miss!

- Mission: Impossible
- Kickle Cubicle

- Plus Previews

TMNT: The Arcade Game
Solar Jetman

- Special

Giant Game Boy Feature

Official Nintendo Seal of Quality™

Nintendo THE SOURCE FOR NES PLAYERS STRAIGHT FROM THE PROS

CONTENTS

Foreword by Rob McCallum 6

Preface 7

Acknowledgments 8

Nintendo NES Games M–Z 9

Everything I Needed to Know, I Learned from the NES by Shane Stein 416

Sports Games of the NES by Patrick Hickey Jr. 418

Appendix 1: PAL-Exclusive NES Games 419

Appendix 2: HES-Exclusive NES Games 421

Appendix 3: Miscellaneous NES Games Not Listed Elsewhere in This Book . . . 422

Special Thanks to Kickstarter Backers and Early Book Supporters 423

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

FOREWORD

by Rob McCallum

Let's be absolutely clear: the Nintendo Entertainment System is the best video game system of all time. No, this isn't a fanboy nostalgic discourse about my toy being better than yours, because I grew up with it and my era is better. No offense to the gamers of other generations or the ones from my generation who disagree with my statement, but I'm right and you're wrong. If you don't want to take my word for it, let's quickly delve into the many reasons why the NES is the top gun of gaming consoles.

The NES came out at a time when technology existed that gave gamers many options that were closer to an arcade experience than earlier systems. NES players could consume game after game without suffering any graphical or auditory nausea while playing, and see faithfulness in most of the arcade ports. But the NES didn't necessarily need arcade ports to find its audience. Most of the console's key memorable titles are exclusive to the library. A lot of these games are massive franchises today that have been ported to every possible device because they're that good. The seeds of even the most recent release of those games are directly tied to the original NES versions.

No discussion about the NES is complete without delving into game design and gameplay. There is a delicate balance between making a game easy enough to pick up, lead the player through the experience, challenge them along the way, and do so with a compelling story that never deviates from the way in which you've taught the player to navigate the world before them. Whether it's *Super Mario Bros.*, *Final Fantasy*, *Double Dragon*, or *Mega Man*, the mechanics of getting through each stage, level, world, or game was done so well that anyone in the family could pick up a controller and play. You can see this same philosophy decades later with Nintendo's introduction of the Wii. If everyone can play, enjoy, and have fun, it's a good game. You didn't have to be an expert or wizard to play the NES (although some titles were notoriously difficult to beat); you just needed to put some effort in, because conceptually everything was there to succeed to some degree in the majority of games for the console.

The soundtracks, theme songs, and memorable audio effects of many NES games stay in our heads days after the console has been turned off. This has nothing to do with the fact that the game(s) came out in the '80s, but everything to do with excellent composition, design, and ingenuity. The limited audio resources when creating for the NES pushed the artists and game developers to get something that was evergreen and could stand the test of time. There are certainly great soundtracks and sound design for many games today, but nothing seems as iconic and alluring as the soundscape one finds when playing through the NES library.

Speaking of the library, I think one would be hard pressed to find a better ratio of good or great games to cannon fodder than the NES library. In my estimation, there's at least one good game for every six games. Even if you wanted to be conservative and say there's only one good game for every eight, you'd still find yourself with almost a hundred quality games to play for hours on end. It's increasingly rare for a stat like that to get duplicated. Sure, not as many games were being created when the NES was around, but it's not about quantity, it's all about quality, and the NES has quality in spades.

Now let's turn our attention to this most impressive reference guide written by longtime gamer, author, and historian Brett Weiss. It's actually more of a tome or spell book because it's so thoroughly crafted and woven with copious amounts of detail that will simultaneously turn the gears in your head and create new thoughts you never considered. Each entry packs detailed information, box art, screenshots, and all the pertinent info that can turn anyone into an expert in a short period of time. It functions as an incredible resource for all things NES, at least concerning games M through Z.

With this book, which I hope you'll keep on your coffee table for all to see, you can flip through the pages and discuss the games, then set out on an adventure to find and play them—which is further testament to the console's appeal. As evidenced by things like this book, the NES is a system that doesn't die. People still love the console all these years later and not in a niche kind of way. With so many games creating so many memories, and with so many games spawning so many franchises, it has to be considered the best of the best. This book is a great testament to that and the perfect companion for any NES adventure.

Game on,
—Rob McCallum

Somewhere beyond the fifth dimension and usually in a pillow fort, Rob McCallum spends his time building elaborate story-driven worlds, playing with action figures, and air drumming to some favorite tunes. The Emmy-nominated and award-winning filmmaker has been featured on NBC, CBS, CBC Radio•One, WIRE, and Destructoid for his work that centers on fandom, pop culture, and everything in between. He's conjured more than $400K via crowdfunding, sold films to Netflix and broadcasters around the world, and frequently contributes to books and podcasts. He's obsessed with all things Jim Henson, has a deep love of *Masters of the Universe*, and one day hopes to visit Duckburg.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

PREFACE

Whew! Here we are wrapping up another *Omnibus* two-volume set based on a beloved Nintendo console. The follow-up to *The SNES Omnibus*, *The NES Omnibus,* covering all the original releases for the console, was initially going to be just one book. What!? Not possible, you might be thinking—too many games! How could you fit all those titles between two covers!? Well, you are right about that.

But let's back up a bit.

The *SNES Omnibus* was a resounding success. Not only have both volumes sold well, they have received rave reviews, and Schiffer Publishing was willing to listen to my pitch for another two-volume set for a major console. The company readily agreed, so I got busy on it. And then it occurred to me that before doing another two-volume set, I could write a single-volume *Omnibus* to give readers a break on their bank accounts before asking them to shell out for two more books.

As such, *The NES Omnibus* was conceived and I put the prospective two-volume *Omnibus* project on hold. I've been a huge fan of the Nintendo Entertainment System ever since I got my original console for Christmas in 1987 (which you can read about in my preface to *The NES Omnibus, Vol. 1*), and I was delighted at the prospect of writing a big, beautiful, single-edition hardcover book about one of my favorite game systems.

But then reality set in. Once I got to work on *The NES Omnibus,* I couldn't control myself. I simply stuffed too much information and too many photos on each page for the book to be readable, with most of the games getting only half a page each. Plus, I wanted to include vintage ads for many of the games and more nostalgic stories from contributing writers. The latter is what so many of you like the most about the *Omnibus* books, so those were a top priority. And to be perfectly honest, they're my favorite aspect of the books as well—it's super fun to read and edit the stories and share them with you.

Said stories in this book, which I call "Insider Insights," are awesome. Popular YouTuber "The Immortal" John Hancock reveals what it was like renting games with his family when he was a kid. Legendary programmer David Warhol gives behind-the-scenes info on developing *Maniac Mansion* and *Monster Truck Rally*. Noted authors Ken Horowitz and Patrick Hickey Jr. share their love of *Super Mario Bros. 2* and *Tecmo Bowl*, respectively. Krystle Tiedeman, the producer of *The King of Arcades*, wrote a hilarious story about playing *Taboo* with friends. And you've simply got to read YouTuber Christopher Pico's epic saga of playing *Mad Max* as a young game tester back in the day. If you like video game culture and nostalgia, you're going to love this trip back through time to the '80s and early '90s from a variety of perspectives.

As for my memories in the book, I wax nostalgic about a bunch of NES titles, including such personal favorites as *Mario Bros.*, *Popeye*, *Super Mario Bros.*, *Super Sprint*, and even *Trog!*, a hidden gem for the console. I trash some terribly disappointing games as well, such as *Superman* and *Super Pitfall*. And of course I wrote a synopsis for each game.

In addition to stories, reviews, and synopses, *The NES Omnibus, Vol. 2 (M–Z)* features box art, screenshots, developer and publisher info, and historical data, along with quotes from vintage magazines and respected websites to give readers a well-rounded look at each game. I even quote other books, since this is a scholarly, research-heavy effort, as well as a book that is meant to entertain. At the back of the book you'll find listings for foreign NES releases and miscellaneous titles, as well as a pair of super-insightful essays (by Shane Stein and Patrick Hickey Jr.) about specific aspects of the console. I am indebted to every person and every resource that helped make this book possible.

As I write this preface we are in the midst of a global pandemic, as the novel coronavirus continues making people sick and shutting down public events and venues, including arcades, bookstores, and video game conventions. The world is starting to open back up, but it is risky for everyone involved, and the politics of the situation only make things worse. I mention this because working on *The NES Omnibus* has been super therapeutic during this terrible time. The year 2020 has been a struggle in many ways, but writing has been a great distraction.

Creating videos about games and other areas of popular culture has been a nice diversion as well. If you haven't done so already, hop over to YouTube and subscribe to my channel, which is simply called "Brett Weiss." I think you'll enjoy my "Tales from a Retro Gamer" series.

Well, it's time I sign off so you can get to reading the rest of this book and so I can get to work on that postponed *Omnibus* project I mentioned earlier.

As always, thanks for reading!

—Brett Weiss

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to all the gifted writers and industry insiders who contributed supplemental stories about many of the games in this book. These fine folks include Jon Balofsky, Chris Bores, Jason Breininger, Matt Daley, Tyler Esposito, Blair Farrell, Raymond Fix, Zachary Gasiorowski, Jon M. Gibson, Kieren Hawken, Matt Henzel, Patrick Hickey Jr., Ken Horowitz, Michelle Ireland, Steve Juon, Chris Leathco, John Lester, Brian Lesyk, Danny Mattice, Stevan Mena, Kale Menges, Matt Miller, Joshua L. Olson, Papa Pete, Eric Perez, Christopher Pico, Kris Randazzo, Anthony L. Restivo, Dan Ryan, Jon Sakura, Greg Sewart, Andy Slaven, Shane Stein, Rob Strangman, Michael Thomasson, Alex Thompson, Krystle Tiedeman, Sean Tiedeman, John Trenbeath, Mike Vito, David Warhol, and Steve Woita. Thanks also to the many people I quoted in the book, including Dylan Cornelius, who runs the excellent review site questicle.net.

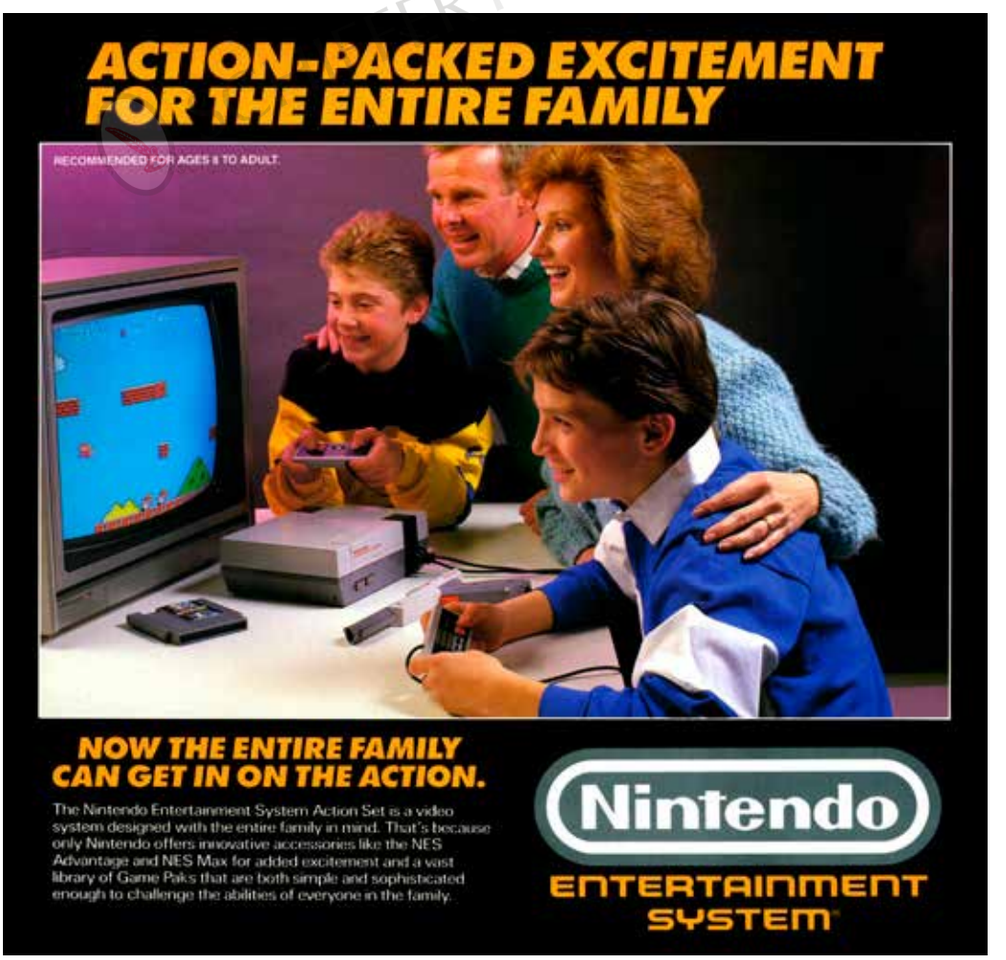
Special thanks for various images in the book to John Hancock, Tod Curtis, Dain Anderson (formerly of Nintendo Age), Matt Henzel (videogameobssession.com), Hardcoregaming101 (www.hardcoregaming101.net), Vintage Computer and Gaming (www.vintagecomputing.com), Moby Games (www.mobygames.com), Heritage Auctions (HA.com), GameFaqs (gamefaqs.gamespot.com), Retromags (www.retromags.com), and Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org). Thanks to Michael Cavacini for help with proofreading and thanks to James Pledger for editing my YouTube videos. And thanks to Miley Cyrus, KISS, and Ozzy Osbourne, whom I listened to obsessively while working on the book.

Special thanks to my Patreon supporters: Downphoenix, Justinian, Evan Boaz, Heath Chamerski, Michael Dougherty, DuhawkTW, James Kosmicki, Robert Lacy, Mathew Miller, Benjamin Murbach, Pete Nowell, Papa Pete, Eric Plunk, Josh Smith, Joshua Smith, Shane Stein, Bridgette Tullos, Edwin M., Iceman2343, RetroChiGuy1, Julie Bryant, Joel Bartley, Glenn Peffers, David Isherwood, Fabrizio Pedrazzini, Brian Stark, Sarah Szefer, Kenny Ryan, and RetroGamer FL.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Nintendo NES Games M–Z

PUBLISHING



Mach Rider

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D2.
GAME TYPE: Demolition/ Combat Racing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1986.

A system launch title, *Mach Rider* has you driving a fast motorcycle down winding highways in the year 2112 and firing a machine gun at enemy vehicles while avoiding rocks, oil spots, oil drums, water, tacks, and bomber balls. The enemies all have the same design (postapocalyptic three-wheelers), but they do come in six different colors and strengths, ranging from one shot to destroy the pink vehicles to six shots to destroy the black ones. You not only pass enemies, but enemies will come up from behind, and they can be tough to dodge. You can also elect to race without enemies. If you run slow or crash you lose energy, so keeping a good pace and using your reflexes to steer quickly is important. Shifting through the four gears is important as well for going fast. Your motorcycle has no brakes, but you can downshift to slow your speed. Driving on the shoulder also slows you down. Using 37 different course parts, you can create (but not save) your own tracks in Design Mode.

Memories: I played this black box game back in the late '80s because it was a popular title and a lot of people had it, but I didn't own it until the 2009 Oklahoma Video Game Expo. A chain retro gaming and movie store had a booth at the show and I walked up to their table just as they were putting out a bunch of boxed, complete, mint-condition NES games. I grabbed up a bunch of them because they were way underpriced. At $3.99 *Mach Rider* was a stone-cold bargain.

Notable Quotable:
"If you love fast driving games, you'll love this one. There was a tremendous sense of speed, and with the additional element of fighting enemies, it becomes more than just a 'drive fast and avoid other vehicles' type of game. We were very impressed with how the game handles and graphics are up to usual Nintendo standards." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1986)

Notable Quotable:
"Once you get over the initial embarrassment caused by crashing into everything precise control comes quite easily, and this is due to a certain amount of help from the computer. It leans you into the bends and doesn't overreact when you do. It may not sustain interest after you've got well up in the levels, but designing your own tracks will take up time in the future." —*Advanced Computer Entertainment* (January 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"Having seen *Mach Rider* screenshots I was looking forward to playing this, but unfortunately I found myself coming away disappointed. The 3D effect is fast, but the road moves quite jerkily, and the motorbike controls don't feel particularly good. The graphics are quite garish, too, although the sprites are solid looking . . . the endurance and solo options are let down by being too easy . . . Fighting, on the other hand, is very tough, almost to the point of being off-putting . . . *Mach Rider* isn't totally dire—it just isn't good enough to justify the massive £30 price tag. The gameplay is fun for a while but doesn't hold your attention long enough." —*Computer and Video Games* (April 1989)

Insider Insight: I have no idea where my best friend Evan got all his games, but he had the most interesting collection of stuff when we were kids. I'd never even heard of *Mach Rider* before he popped it into his NES and fired it up during one of our many sleepovers. Objectively it wasn't very good. Playing it now I can't even identify what resonated with me back then, but I must have found something compelling because we decided to complete the game that weekend. To the best of my recollection we actually did, though I can't remember which mode it was in. I've harbored fond memories of my time with *Mach Rider* for years, but every time I play it these days I put it down inside of five minutes. Such an odd first-party title for Nintendo! —Greg Sewart, game developer, former Previews and Reviews Editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

Insider Insight: Back in college I worked at a GameStop when the company was originally phasing out the reselling of used 8-bit and 16-bit games. I took full advantage of my employee discount and snagged quite a few NES carts for a great price, one of which was *Mach Rider*, a game I hadn't heard of before. Upon getting the cartridge home, though, I quickly discovered it was completely nonfunctional. My NES absolutely refused to recognize it. I tried every usual trick I knew of at that time -- everything from the traditional "blowing" in the cartridge to rubbing alcohol and cotton swabs. Nothing seemed to work. Thus *Mach Rider* became my first experience in "open cart surgery," as YouTuber John Riggs calls it.

Luckily the game was one of the "five-screw" carts from the initial run of black label titles, so I was able to open the shell with just a screwdriver. On inspection the circuit board seemed intact, but I quickly noticed the amount of corrosion on the connector pins. I spent a few hours rummaging through our garage looking for a proper cleaning solvent (my dad was an auto mechanic back in the day) and something to scrub and scrape the connectors. I was determined to play this mysterious Nintendo game one way or another. I ended up spending a couple hours intricately cleaning the pins like an archaeologist, carefully picking away in the dust to unearth some valuable ancient relic. I felt mighty proud of myself when the cartridge fired right up afterward. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mad Max

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Gray Matter.
GAME TYPE: Demolition/Combat Racing/Action; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

Loosely based on *The Road Warrior* (1981) and *Beyond Thunderdome* (1985)—the cinematic sequels to *Mad Max* (1979)—this game puts players in a postapocalyptic, war-torn future, driving through wastelands (which are kind of ugly but do represent the films fairly well) dodging oil slicks, barricades, and pits while shooting dynamite at enemy cars. The action is viewed from an angled, top-down perspective, and the objective is to find the entrance to the arena, which can be difficult. You will also walk around in mines (viewed from overhead), fighting off thugs with a shotgun. Prior to entering the arena you must find enough food and water to purchase an arena pass. You should drive carefully and grab fuel, because if you run out or your car gets destroyed you must restart the level at the beginning. There are three levels, each divided into wastelands, that are open-ended, and an arena where you must destroy a certain number of cars (it's kind of fun to knock other cars into pits) and find the exit. At the end of the last level you'll battle the Ultimate Warrior in a crossbow duel. The control pad moves the car in the direction you want while the B button puts on the brakes, making for a fairly unusual driving system (there is no accelerator). Combat is mediocre at best, running out of fuel is a drag, and you constantly get bumped by other cars, making for a tedious game.

Notable Quotable:
"The game is fun initially . . . Though each new level is difficult, all are fundamentally the same. That makes things pretty boring once you've mapped the terrain. Also the game is over much too quickly. The arenas are always enjoyable—though, again, if you've seen one, you've pretty much seen 'em all . . . sound effects are terrific, regardless of the game's other failings." —*How to Win at Video Games 4* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The game's main portion, in which you roam the overworld looking for gas, is the big problem. You start the game with a nearly empty tank, and it's constantly dwindling even if you're sitting still. So you need to know exactly where the next fuel is and go right to it, or you'll just meander around until you run out of fuel and die. The car is actually quite durable to enemy attacks, but you have only a few sticks of dynamite, which act as both your only means of defense and the only means of clearing roadblocks . . . I actually kind of like the car's handling, and they wrung a nice, deep, bassy engine noise out of the NES's humble sound chip . . . At its best moments the game is just subpar and bland . . . at its worst it is infuriating . . . you're asked to just blunder around and die numerous times discovering where everything is." —Plato's Cavern (www.platoscavern.com)

Insider Insight: When I was a kid the Mindscape headquarters was a couple of towns away from where I lived. My father frequented their warehouse sales where they would discount their overstock of computer games. In early 1990, while attending a sale, he saw that they were holding a contest for kids with Nintendo Entertainment Systems. The four winners would become beta testers of a new game they were developing for the popular console. Since my brother and I had just gotten one for Christmas a couple of months earlier my father signed me up. I won.

I was brought into the main office of Mindscape along with three other kids in their early teens and was handed a Nintendo Famicom, a cartridge that had an exposed circuit board, and a questionnaire. We were to play the game every day for two weeks, and once that period of time was over we were to fill out the form that would ask all sorts of questions about the game. They wouldn't tell us what the game was. This certainly piqued my interest. In return for our opinions we would be given two free games from their back catalog and even some games that had yet to be released as a reward. SOLD!

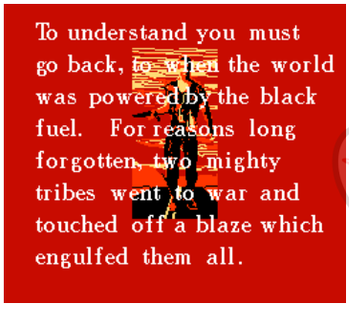
When I booted up the Famicom, I was surprised to see that the title screen being displayed on the television was *Mad Max*. I had read about a game based on the apocalyptic film series being in development for the NES. I absolutely loved *The Road Warrior* and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, but was less than excited to learn that I was being asked to test a licensed game (I had yet to have my *Gremlins 2* epiphany) based on those films.

Within the first five minutes of playing the game I knew I absolutely hated it.

Usually kids like to brag about winning a contest such as this. I was embarrassed by it. Those days were miserable, because I couldn't stand this game that I was being forced to play for two weeks straight. When friends would ask me about it I would reply with "I don't want to talk about it." Two weeks of absolute torture. When I finally brought myself to fill out the questionnaire I let the developers know just how much I hated their game in detail.

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mad Max



When the day came to return to the Mindscape headquarters to return the Famicoms and our questionnaires, I was told at the door that the four beta testers would be participating in a focus group where we would all discuss our thoughts on the game. I vividly remember being filled with absolute dread about having to voice my opinions to the faces of the people who created this festering turd of a video game. I just wanted my two free games and to get out of there. But no, the torture was prolonged for at least another hour.

I was the last to speak about *Mad Max*. The three other winners sang the game's praises (obviously lying—one of them told me so) so they could snag their free loot and bolt out of there. I saw the concerned look on the face of a female developer who was looking over my questionnaire and felt the blood drain from my face. Would they deny me the games they had promised if I hated their product? I was told to speak honestly and that any and all information I provided would go toward helping to make the game better. They asked for it, so I gave it to them.

I let them know everything that I hated about the game, from the graphics to the gameplay. It didn't feel like *Mad Max*, more like a game that was developed to be something else and later was made into a *Mad Max* game (turned out I was right). I told them the objectives were vague and that the mines you were supposed to find were so far off the roads you traveled on that it took me a whole day to find the first one. The controls were crap, the color palettes were ugly, the music was annoying . . . You name it, I criticized it. The looks I received when I told them "Max didn't use dynamite in the movies!" were pretty intense. The Mindscape people didn't look happy, except when I told them that they were abusing the license, as it was one of my favorite film franchises.

Suddenly notepads came out. Fancy pens. Bifocals. I had their complete attention. None of the other beta testers had seen any of the films so they wanted to know what they could do to make the game feel more like *Mad Max*. I told them.

"Why have the Thunderdome announcer guy in the game if you're not going to include Thunderdome at all?"

"You have The Humungous in the game. Where is Aunty Entity? Or Ironbar? Or even the Boomerang Guy? They'd make great bosses!"

"Where's the gyrocopter pilot?"

"Where's Max's dog?"

"Where are Savanna and the other kids left behind in the wasteland?"

I don't think any of them had seen the movies because they looked totally confused. I surmised that all the information they had about the films came from the commercials or the VHS box art. They sure did take notes, though. Lots and lots of notes.

I actually thought I was contributing to the further development of the game. That I was helping them make it better. As if they knew the game was subpar and were hoping some kid would come along and solve all their problems for them. And that kid was me! They thanked me profusely for my honesty, for assisting them with their "future hit" game, and finally asked me what two games I wanted in return.

I told them that the games they were offering from their back catalog I wasn't interested in at all, but there were two upcoming games they were offering that I wanted instead: *720°* and *RoadBlasters*. They enthusiastically agreed to send them to me once they became available.

I was completely unaware when *Mad Max* was finally released a few months later. There was no fanfare as far as I can remember. I only found out about it when one of my friends rented it and invited me over so I could tell him about how the game had been changed since I had beta tested it. My heart sank because it turned out to be the EXACT SAME GAME. Not one thing had been changed. The same garbage graphics, the same garbage gameplay, the same garbage dynamite-throwing.

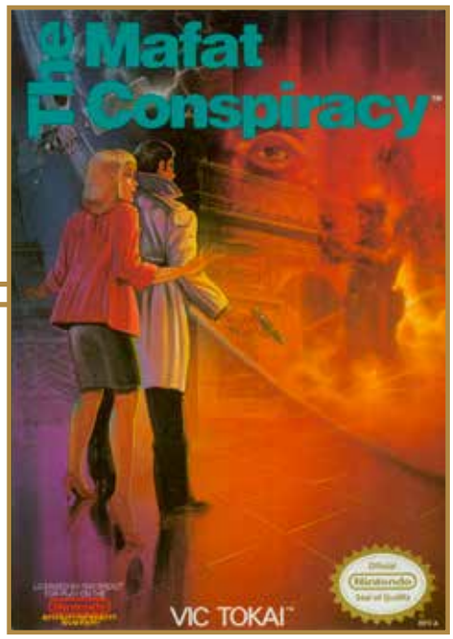
I was mad. Like really, really mad. But I was mostly mad at myself for believing that anything I had said in that focus group was going to change anything. That those Mindscape people were really just patronizing me because of how excited I was to be able to tell them how to (supposedly) fix their game. I fell for it hook, line, and sinker, and learned a valuable lesson in the process—never take anything at face value. A lesson I learned twice thanks to Mindscape because they never did send me that copy of *RoadBlasters*.

Epilogue:
Every YouTuber has a developer they cannot stand for various reasons. Most pick LJN. Some Acclaim, or even Ocean. Mine is definitely Mindscape. They duped me. Twice. Outside of *Wing Commander* on the SNES (because I loved the PC game), I made it a point to not purchase any games they released from that point on. —Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico, YouTuber and Filmmaker

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Mafat Conspiracy

PUBLISHER: Vic Tokai.
DEVELOPER: Aicom.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game/Adventure; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



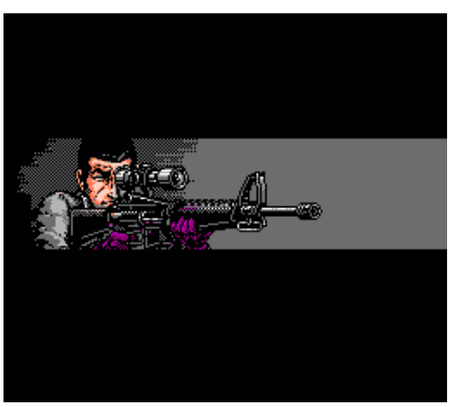
The sequel to *Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode*, *The Mafat Conspiracy* once again puts players in the role of anime character Duke Togo (a.k.a. Golgo 13), a sharp-shooting secret agent who's smooth with the ladies. Duke has been assigned by the CIA to eliminate the leader of the Mafat Revolutionary Group, which is threatening to bring down all American and Soviet satellites. The action is divided into several types of gameplay scenarios, the main mode of which is side-scrolling action. Gamers shoot and kick dogs, scorpions, and monkey men, plus henchmen armed with boomerangs, guns, grenades, knives, and scythes. There's platforming as well, and you can grab ammo from fallen enemies. To gain additional health, you can enter buildings and shoot an enemy in first-person, 3-D maze action—maps in the manual will help you keep from getting lost. First-person sniper sections let you aim and fire a single rifle shot at a target, aided by a targeting scope and adjusting the aim to account for wind conditions. You'll also drive a Ferrari, viewed from behind, down twisting, turning roads, accelerating, shifting gears, throwing grenades at other cars, and trying to reach the finish line in time. The maze sequences are redundant in terms of gameplay and visuals (the walls are a consistent gray), but the rest of the game is nicely illustrated and more fully realized. Cinematic cutscenes tell the involved storyline.

Notable Quotable:

"A story straight out of a James Bond movie . . . a dramatic improvement over the first [game] and definitely one of the year's best . . . a lot of substance . . . graphics are topnotch, but the gameplay could have been slightly better . . . the action scenes seem a little bit less than what they could have been . . . there's never much intensity here. Good anyway." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are a step up from *Top Secret Episode*. They're sharp and considerably less goofy than in this game's predecessor . . . Unfortunately there's a lot more gray in this game . . . gameplay is more straightforward and linear . . . controls are simple and tight . . . Audio is about what you'd expect—beeps and boops for the punch impacts, gunshots, and explosions, but they all sound appropriate. The music is a series of grooving beats that help propel the action along, despite being repetitive." —Deviant Art (www.deviantart.com)



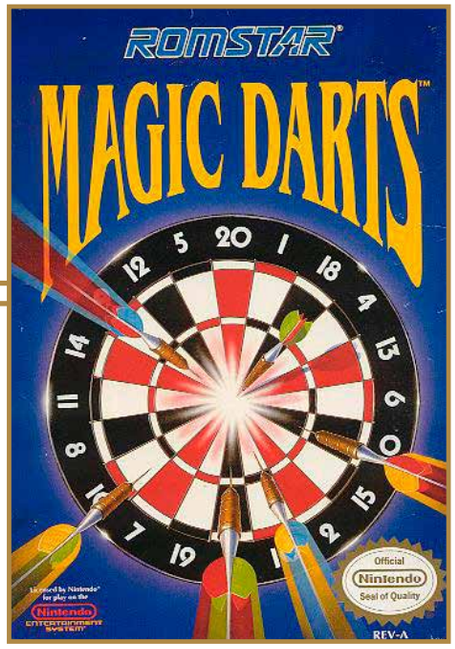
Insider Insight: "When I was growing up *Golgo 13* was one of my favorite NES games. My brothers and I spent hours taking turns playing, and I later became a fan of the *Golgo 13* manga by Takao Saito. The comics were amazing and I always wanted to experience more. While I was going to university my friend John ran a stall on campus where he sold retro video games. Thanks to John I began collecting many classic games, and when he heard of my love for *Golgo 13*, he told me he had something to show me. I could not believe it when I saw it, but it turned out there was a sequel to the NES game I loved so much. I bought the game and played it the second I got home.

The Mafat Conspiracy was much like the first game, but there were subtle improvements. The graphics and music were better and the gameplay was more fun. The controls were also a bit more responsive and the first person mazes were more manageable. Best of all it was a sequel to one of my favorite games of my childhood, and I was experiencing it for the first time. The game even managed to get things past Nintendo's censors like its predecessor, so it still seems more mature than a typical NES game. I prefer the first game due to nostalgia, but as a *Golgo 13* fan, *The Mafat Conspiracy* is everything I could have asked for and is no doubt the better title. Both games are still part of my regular play rotation, and I will always be thankful to John for making me aware of the excellent sequel. —Jon Balofsky, who has written about video games for such outlets as Playeressence, Shigeru News, Real Otaku Gamer, and Indie Gamer Team

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Magic Darts

PUBLISHER: Romstar.
DEVELOPER: SETA.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Darts; 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



One of very few video or computer games where dart throwing is the central activity (the computer title *180* from 1986 is the only other one that comes to mind), *Magic Darts* features 10 playable characters, including a monkey, an alien, a ninja, a robot, and an assortment of men and women. Gamers can also select from three different dart weights and compete in six different versions of the popular barroom sport: 301, 501, 701, Count Up, Round the Clock, and Half It. The bottom ¼ of the screen shows the player, who is positioned on the right, throwing darts at a sideview board positioned on the left. The top ¾ of the screen depicts a large, traditional, black-and-red dart board viewed from the front. To set the position, curve, angle, and power of a dart throw golf-like meters are used. There's only so much you can do with a darts simulator and this game does it pretty well.

Notable Quotable:

"There's not a whiff of magic on display, unless you count chimps and robots playing darts as magical . . . Otherwise this is straitlaced, generic stuff . . . unless you have a gang of three rowdies and a Four Score I beg you to reconsider. What are dartboards these days, forty bucks? They might not be magic, but they're real." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

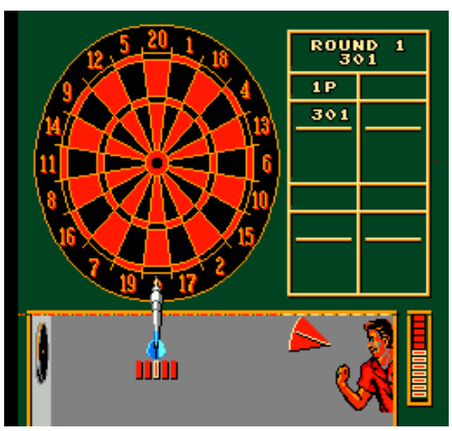
Notable Quotable:

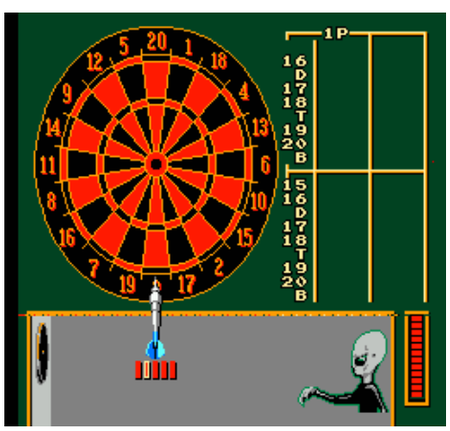
"An excellent rendition of the barroom pastime . . . The graphics are simple but effective and the energetic music keeps things lively. Still, as good as *Magic Darts* is at what it does, this is still just darts, so the excitement level and replay value aren't very high. Darts fans would probably rather play the real thing and the casual gamer most likely won't be interested." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Wow! This cart is actually fun! It can become boring after playing alone, but competing with friends is a major plus. *Magic Darts* is humorous, too! The different characters add a brilliant touch as well. Use the bruiser, Max, and watch the dart get flattened when it strikes the target! Romstar has taken a sport that is only average for play value and improved on it by adding unique characters . . . a refreshing new addition to the Nintendo sports genre." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1991)

Memories: I've never played darts in any official capacity, but we had a dartboard in our garage when I was growing up, and now I have an electronic (i.e. safe) dart board in my game room. As for virtual video darts—why not? Most every other recreational activity is represented by a video game.

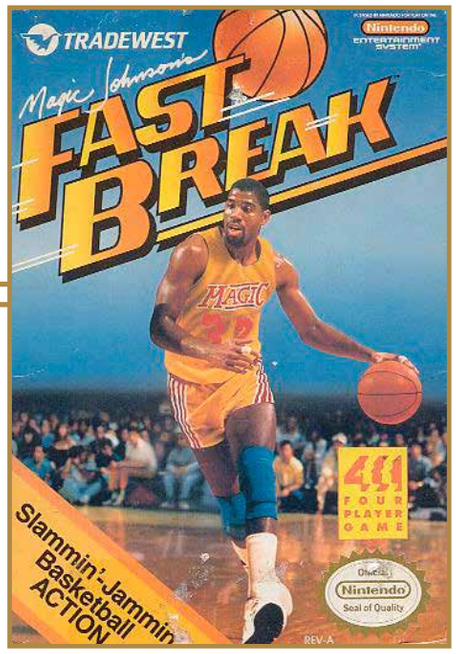


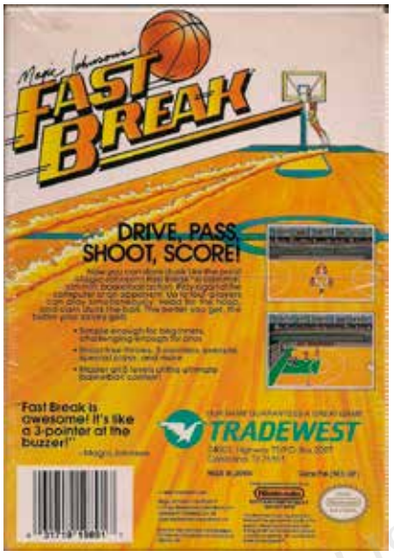


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Magic Johnson's Fast Break

PUBLISHER: Tradewest.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball; 1, 2, or 4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.





The first basketball cartridge compatible with the NES Satellite, *Magic Johnson's Fast Break* lets one, two, or four armchair athletes engage in a simple game of two-on-two action viewed from an elevated side view perspective (the screen scrolls horizontally to follow the action). An arrow appears over the basketball player you are controlling and pressing B switches control to the other player. There's no tournament or season mode, and Magic himself isn't a playable character, but a close-up of the Los Angeles Lakers Hall of Famer does appear periodically, such as after a player makes a three-pointer. Teams' salaries are raised when they win games but you can't spend that cash on anything. There's no music, and there are no dunk animations such as those found in *Ultimate Basketball*, *Double Dribble*, and *Hoops*—in fact there are no dunks at all, which is strange. Quarters are three minutes in length and you can select from five different difficulty levels. Other features include an animated crowd, fouls, free throws, overtime, steals, stats, jump balls, and a 24-second shot clock. Based on Arcadia's 1988 arcade game.

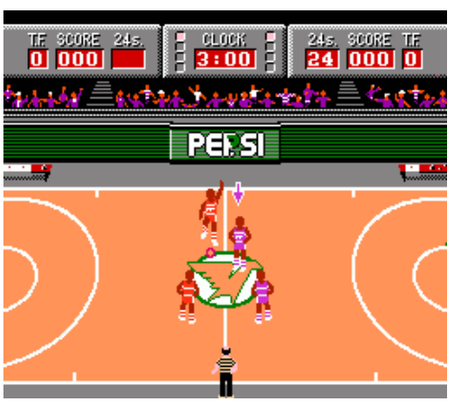
Memories: When I was in junior high and high school, pretty much everyone in the athletics program liked either the Los Angeles Lakers with Magic Johnson, the Boston Celtics with Larry Bird, or the Philadelphia 76ers with Dr. J. I was team Philly and was super excited when my team swept the Lakers in the NBA Finals in 1983. That year also saw the initial release of *One on One: Dr. J vs. Larry Bird*, which I spent a lot more time with (on my ColecoVision and Atari 7800) than *Magic Johnson's Fast Break*.

Notable Quotable:

"It's not an awful game, just trimmed down to the bone. The music was written by Tim Follin, my favorite NES composer, so it's got great tunes that are a bright spot here. The graphics, controls, and gameplay are all at least average . . . very easy game to beat . . . reminds me of *NBA Jam* without any of the things that made that game interesting and fun." —Take on the NES Library (takeontheneslibrary.com)

Notable Quotable:

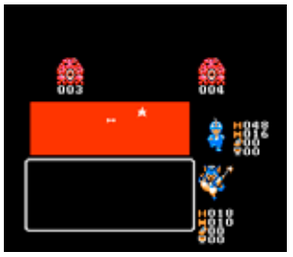
"The unfortunate irony of this video game is in its title. Magic Johnson is not a playable character, just a constant source of annoying interruption; and despite the term 'Fast Break' being used, due to the astonishing ease of stealing (by human or computer) there are very few actually legitimate in-game fast breaks . . . the worst of the NES NBA basketball games . . . poorly paced, poorly played, and poorly presented." —Eric Bailey (nintendolegend.com)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Magic of Scheherazade

PUBLISHER: Culture Brain.
DEVELOPER: Culture Brain.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game; 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



A high-quality game with a hard-to-pronounce name, *The Magic of Scheherazade* is an unusual RPG, offering turn-based fights (you strategically select two characters to engage in battle) as well as *Zelda*-style action (you battle enemies to gain experience and cash). There are three character classes—Saint, Fighter, and Magician, each of varying abilities and weaponry—and five Arabian worlds to conquer: Water, Desert, Winter, Flower, and a mystery level that finds players battling the evil wizard Sabaron, who summoned demons to Arabia in the first place. As in most RPGs, visiting shops and casting spells (killer winds, thunder, fire and star attacks, turning enemies into fireworks, etc.) play prominent roles, as does using such items as swords, magic rods, and a magic carpet. Players can even go to casinos, attend Magic University, and battle giant, screen-filling enemies. The back of the box boasts that the game has more than 750 "dazzling screens."

Notable Quotable:
"An interesting variation of the normal RPG that relies more on graphics to support the quest than similar efforts. The graphics, unfortunately, are nothing revolutionary, but the quest has its high points . . . Nothing sensational." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"It's very unusual to play, and many a casual gamer will be turned away from its somewhat opaque dialogue, confusing maze-like areas, and irritating battles. But if you dig deep enough and maintain a certain level of patience, you'll discover that it's not entirely bad. Journeying through the countryside has its charm at times, and nothing beats the thrill of jabbing a green bee in the neck fat as it flies innocently and aimlessly around one square parcel of land." —Random Access (randomacc.net)

Notable Quotable:
"A charming game of almost Byzantine complexity . . . very few Nintendo games take as long to learn . . . The number of items, spells, bonuses, allies, sub-screens, and so forth is truly massive. Happily everything is clearly organized, so what at first seems unwieldy soon becomes natural and logical . . . well worth the time and trouble it takes to learn . . . the graphics are absolutely delightful . . . If there's a Nintendo game that's prettier to look at, we haven't seen it." —*Game Players* (December 1989)

Insider Insight: Like many other kids at the time, I received a free copy of *Dragon Warrior* when I got a subscription to *Nintendo Power*. I quickly fell in love with the game. I also discovered *Final Fantasy* at my local rental store and dug into the RPG genre at a young age, desperate to find other games that played like it. When I picked up *Magic of Scheherazade* I knew little about it. I bought it with four other games from the rental store as they began phasing out their NES inventory. When I began playing it, I thought the game was more like *Legend of Zelda* than *Final Fantasy*. Then, after exploring the town and battling in the overworld, I was surprised when the screen switched over to a turn-based style battle. It was a great realization to see that *Magic of Scheherazade* was actually a fusion of *Zelda* and *Dragon Warrior*, offering both battle styles in the same game! It became a hidden gem in my collection. It was an obscure game, but to me it stood tall with the better-known NES RPGs of the day. The chapter system was a bit different, and the allies in my party were quite strange compared to the medieval fantasy RPGs I had played before, but the Arabian setting was a cool change of pace. I spent many hours working my way through this diamond in the rough. —Chris Leathco, blogger at Retro Gaming Roundup, author of *Afterglow* and *The Virtual Boy Game Library*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Magician

PUBLISHER: Taxan.
DEVELOPER: Eurocom.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

In *Magician*, you, as a wizard named Paul, must journey through the kingdom of Merlwood, which consists of towns, wilderness, lakes, forests, caverns, dungeons, castles, and towers. You'll engage in real-time battles with creatures (rats, skeletons, dragons, and the like) beset upon the land by Abadon, an evil magician. The action scrolls vertically, horizontally, and diagonally, and Paul can run, jump (over gaps and onto moving platforms), and even fly. As with most RPGs there are plenty of puzzles to solve, including overhead view areas where Paul must use holes to make stones shift. Other activities include talking to townsfolk to garner clues and finding or purchasing keys, shields, staffs, lightning, food, potions, and other items. And of course there's plenty of spell casting, much of it weapons-based, such as firing spinning axes, large boulders, and fast lightning bolts. There are protective and object-revealing spells as well. A fairly obscure title, *Magician* is easily one of the more complex games in the NES library.

Notable Quotable:
"The variety of spells enables you to do practically anything and endows the cart with an extraordinary creative flair. Part of the fun is messing with them to see what they do. (I never found out what the dragon's egg was good for!) If you want to add some magic to your life, try *Magician*." —*GamePro* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"*Magician* defies traditional game categories. Many elements are straight out of roleplaying—levels of achievement, provisioning yourself with food and water, talking to everything in sight, etc.—but you can also fight and move as in an action game, and there are mazes to solve as in a puzzle game. So, what is *Magician*? How about simply calling it fun." —*Nintendo Power* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"A variety of enemies keeps play fresh throughout the levels. Unfortunately combat is mostly superfluous, as enemies rarely are an obstacle to overcome and many times fail to provide a reward for the risk involved . . . The most memorable part of the game is entering the spells by selecting different runic combinations . . . The puzzle rooms don't offer any risk, but the rewards for getting through them are always beneficial . . . Finding the items that allow free use of spells is key to getting through the game successfully . . . one of the best NES musical scores I've heard. It really enhances the atmosphere. The sprite work is unique; it hardly feels like an NES game . . . provides a complete experience for any player." —The RPG Consoler (allconsolerpgs.blogspot.com)

Insider Insight: I only recently started watching *Supernatural*. I was a dead-set *X-Files* fan and refused to believe any show could compare. What could binge-watching a series started in 2005 have to do with an NES game from 1990? When the Winchesters encountered an evil demon named Abaddon I couldn't shake the familiarity of the name. There was an itch in the back of my mind, someone shouting, "YOU DID IT! YOU KILLED ABADDON!" It finally clicked when I looked at the list of games for this book.

I was Paul, a—no—THE Magician, and I had tried for days to figure out the complex balance of fulfilling basic needs of hunger and thirst while also gaining experience and feverishly recording spells in my Mead notebook. Little did I know I was building essential skills for many years of playing *The Sims*. I was fortunate to have a best friend assist me, feeding me Pop Tarts and reminding me to keep my mana up. We vowed to beat the game that weekend, because we had to return it to our mutual acquaintance on Monday or he would be royally pissed. So it became an all-nighter. My friend pretended to wipe fake sweat from my brow as we grew delirious with sleep deprivation, reassuring me that my quest would be fruitful and people of Merlwood would honor me for eternity. Turns out Abadon (possible relation to Abaddon?) was all talk. After the *Zelda-Oregon Trail* mashup quest and puzzles the actual boss battle wasn't so tough. Our celebration was quickly silenced by my mother, who did not share in our triumphant middle-of-the-night shouts of "Huzzah!" Unfortunately there was no counter spell for "wakey-wakey" to cast upon my parents and return them to slumber so we might continue our observance of victory. —Krystle Tiedeman, Librarian, Producer of *The King of Arcades*

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

MagMax

PUBLISHER: FCI.
DEVELOPER: Nihon Bussan.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1988.

Adapted from Nichibutsu's enjoyable (if unspectacular) arcade game from 1985, *MagMax* for the NES is missing certain graphical flourishes (the robot enemies near the beginning of the game don't bob up and down, for example) and the soundtrack has been reworked, but it remains a respectable port. The action begins on the surface of a planet, with gamers guiding a small, tanklike robot body part over simple brown pathways and solid green grass, shooting at more than 30 different types of mechanical enemies and dodging their fire. As play progresses MagMax, who began as the aforementioned body part, can add to his form, ultimately becoming a full-sized robot. This gives him more firepower but also makes him a wider target. He can also maneuver underground, where he will fly, shoot enemies, and dodge spouting lava and falling stalactites. Areas to battle through include Forest, Desert, Sea, and Automated City. The transformative nature of the titular robot sets the game apart, at least to some degree, from other NES shooters.

Notable Quotable:

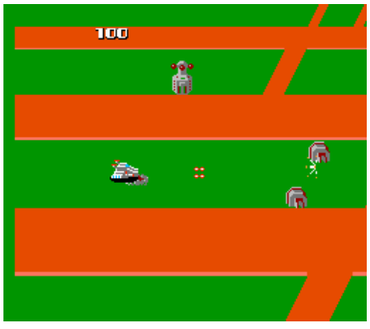
"I hated this game . . . The ship moves like a slug, the game looks terrible, the music is annoying and ear-piercing . . . keeps going and going . . . same thing over and over." — TheHeineHouse (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"I can't get enough of the *MagMax* soundtrack . . . deserves a place on the shelf between *Truxton* and *Cosmic Carnage* . . . It's like *Seicross* mixed with *Voltron* and a generic 1980s spaceship shooter . . . It's not as good as the poster, but it's still pretty good . . . it gets repetitive . . . kind of fun . . . really simple . . . extremely likable." —Classic Game Room (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

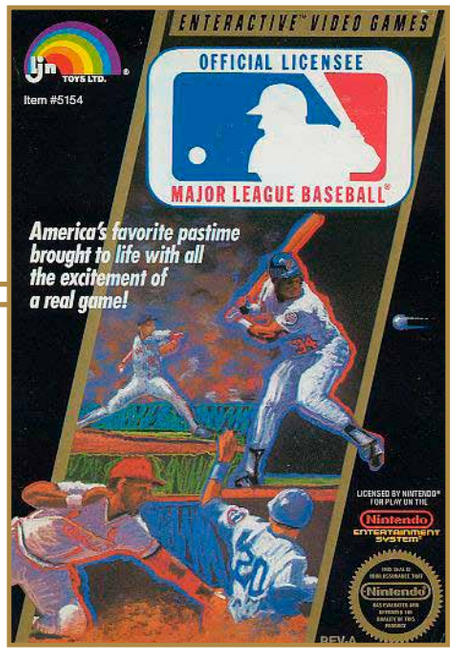
"*MagMax* is notable for its unique power-up system (based around a large robot that the player must assemble) that gives the game additional depth. The more parts the player equips the more powerful he becomes, but his larger size also makes him more exposed to enemy fire. Then the ground/underground formula also contributes to the game's unique appeal and gives some variation to the gameplay. However, while the game has moments of fun, it is undeniably average and repetitive. The graphics are passable and the enemies are hopelessly generic, except for the awesome three-headed Babylon dragon . . . a good conversion and it retains the arcade feel . . . a fairly decent shooter with some excellent ideas, but don't expect anything groundbreaking." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Major League Baseball

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Atlus.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.



The first NES game backed by the big leagues, *Major League Baseball* includes all 26 teams from the 1987 season. The game lacks an MLPBA license, but key players of the time, such as Nolan Ryan of the Astros and Dale Murphy of the Braves, are represented by their jersey number, abilities, throwing arm, and batting order placement, but not their actual names. Batters can only move up and down in the box, but pitchers can throw four types of pitches: slow, curve, fast, and screwball. All the staples of the genre are included, such as pitching, catching, hitting, bunting, pitch outs, base-stealing, fielding, errors, squeeze plays, hit-and-run plays, and tagging up, and gamers can make such managerial moves as bringing in relief pitchers, changing the batting lineup, and using pinch hitters. Want to bring in a DH to face a lefty or have a switch hitter swing from the other side? You can do it. Modes of play include Regular Game, All Star Game, and World Series.

Notable Quotable:

"This is the worst of the baseball games for Nintendo . . . easy to hit and pitch . . . very jerky animation and, most bothersome of all, the screen goes green for a second after each hit, destroying the flow of the game . . . those stop-on-a-dime grounders are idiotic." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"The game has great music . . . Gameplay is pretty standard for the era. The graphics are terrible; everyone looks like they were hit with double gravity and is way too stout, like a team of hobbits . . . Overall this game is pretty bad, even when looking at it through the glasses of your childhood. If you want to play a baseball game on the NES I would recommend *Baseball Stars*." —American-WargamersAssociation.com

Notable Quotable:

"Wretched . . . the game forces you to select position-by-position via a user-hostile interface . . . The batter looks like he's holding a freakin' rolling pin . . . does a poor job of selecting your fielder. A batter can lay down a bunt right in front of home plate, yet the game will force you to field it with your *pitcher*! Even when you field the ball cleanly there's no way you're throwing out the runner at first . . . I can only assume the programmers figured gamers would be so giddy with delight over the MLB license that they'd overlook the ugly graphics, rampant glitches, and general lack of fun." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight: By most accounts, *Major League Baseball* is one of the NES's lesser baseball titles. The gameplay is slow, the graphics are primitive, and while actual Major League teams are in the game, individual MLB players are not (although the game does try to quasi-include them with lightly disguised names and stats). Overall this is a consensus notch below classics like *R.B.I. Baseball* and *Baseball Stars*.

But I enjoyed playing the game as a kid, primarily since it was the only baseball title my brothers and I owned during the first couple years of having our Nintendo. I started collecting baseball cards around the same time, and seeing the real-life teams in the game certainly enhanced my knowledge and enjoyment of the hobby. I loved playing real baseball as well, but I have to admit I was much better at the video game version!

While *Major League Baseball* has its flaws, when you're 9 and 10 years old, you really don't care so much about presentation and graphics—you just want the game to be fun. And on that level, *Major League Baseball* most certainly shined. My brothers and I spent countless hours playing the game with each other and with friends, and we loved almost every moment of it. Combined with trading our cards and playing football and basketball outside, all of which might happen on a typical summer day, the game became a significant aspect of our neighborhood social lives.

Other NES games soon surpassed *Major League Baseball*, and I played it far less frequently after getting *Baseball Stars*. I still own the game cartridge, and while I play it about as often as I trade my old baseball cards (pretty much never), it definitely brings back enjoyable memories. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Maniac Mansion

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Realtime Associates.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Graphic Adventure; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

Maniac Mansion has players guiding three (of seven) teenagers of varying abilities through a large haunted house to rescue a girl. This requires using an arrow cursor to select verbs (get, open, close, use, push, pull, turn on, turn off, and the like) that appear in a list on the lower portion of the screen, then applying said verbs to various household objects within the mansion. Puzzle-laden activities include fixing a phone and a shortwave radio, draining a swimming pool, opening mail, escaping from a dungeon, and much more. Certain elements found in the 1987 computer classic are missing, such as a nude statue and suggestive text, but the game remains an engrossing and challenging adventure.

Notable Quotable:

"There are numerous ways to attack this adventure, which essentially comes down to deciphering some very twisted logic to discover which items are used where. Regrettably, there are a ton of items that are completely useless, so a guide or FAQ is strongly recommended if you are seriously stuck . . . difficult and entertaining adventure." —*Game Informer* (August 1999)

Notable Quotable:

"On the NES, there was no besting LucasArts' *Maniac Mansion* for deep, involved, and genuinely funny pointing and clicking action. Though a bit cumbersome to control with just an NES d-pad and menu bar of potential actions to take, this tale of seven diverse high school kids exploring a kooky manor populated with wacky, blue-skinned mad scientists and alien tentacles was nevertheless addictive, thanks in large part to the great variety of ways to win. You could take several different paths through the house, discover tons of interactions between characters and objects, and replay the game again and again with a completely different trio of the seven potential playable characters." — IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Maniac Mansion* the 61st best NES game

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: The intro of the NES version of *Maniac Mansion* is flawless. On a perfectly clear night, where each individual star can be seen shining brightly around an eerily lit full moon, a single cricket chirps off in the distance. All of a sudden a meteor comes blasting out of the heavens, hurtling toward a spooky mansion that sits high up on a hill. As the meteor hits the ground it's accompanied by a loud CRASH. The crash awakens the mansion's inhabitants and each room begins to light up simultaneously with the sound of a glorious 8-bit drumbeat.

Fans of campy horror such as myself had no idea how much of an impact *Maniac Mansion* would have on them. I was able to "acquire" my copy of the game shortly after its release. My younger cousin came to visit one afternoon and he brought it to my house. His parents had just purchased it for him at Toys "R" Us on the ride over. After seeing that intro I fell in love with the game and I begged him to let me borrow it. Since he had just gotten it he obviously said no. Well, his mom heard me begging and forced him to leave it with me. I smirked as he reluctantly said "fine." I still have that copy to this day. I brought up that memory at a recent family gathering and he remembered it. I still feel bad about the whole thing, but I wouldn't give that cart up for the world. —Mike Vito, writer at HeyPoorPlayer.com

Insider Insight: It was as big a technical challenge as it was an honor to port *Maniac Mansion* from the Commodore 64 to the NES. Early on in development we decided to use as much of the original engine and scripts as possible as opposed to recoding it from scratch. It required fitting the entire game from 360k floppy into 128k ROM, splitting the screen between scrolling and static sections, which I'm pretty sure the NES can't do (we covered it up as well as we could but there is still a visible tear), and porting the entire SCUMM tool chain to NES.

The original game doesn't have wall-to-wall music, but NES games almost always did. As we approached the end of the project the publisher asked, "Where's the music?" to which we scrambled and added nearly a dozen custom songs (my favorite of the NES music I've produced). During approval Nintendo flagged some content as inappropriate, including the infamous "put hamster in microwave," which was removed. Also, at the last minute at their request we removed a "nude" statue, not realizing a game scripter placed the "blow up mansion" button invisibly behind the statue to remove it from the game. The invisible button is still there, and it works!

Embarrassingly, some code to initialize the ROM bank switching chip was left out and undiscovered until after the first manufacturing run of a few hundred thousand units (it worked in test cartridges fine but not in the manufactured version). Fortunately, by clearing the RAM during manufacturing the mechanism worked. —David Warhol, former programmer for Mattel Electronics (on the Intellivision), founder of Realtime Associates, Inc.

Mappy-Land

PUBLISHER: Taxan.
DEVELOPER: TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.

The console-exclusive sequel to Namco's *Mappy* (arcade, 1983), *Mappy-Land* has similar gameplay. You guide Micro Police mouse Mappy as he runs across platforms, bounces on trampolines, grabs items, and avoids the evil cat boss Goro and his gang of Mewkies. It expands upon the concept of the original game with climbable ladders and vines, zip lines, an actual jump button, and eight themed levels: Railroad Town, Western World, Tropical World, Jungle World, Pirates World, Ghost Town, Seventh Avenue, and Muky Town, each of which loops around. The game also adds a variety of relatively ineffectual (and oftentimes indirect) weaponry, including fish, bowling balls, punching bags, and fireworks. Mappy is invulnerable to enemies while bouncing from point to point, but too many jumps will break the trampoline. The objective is to collect all of a certain item in each level to advance to the next. Visually *Mappy-Land* appears flat (if colorful) for an NES title, but *Mappy* fans should enjoy the game's distinctively bouncy challenges. While it was never released in the arcades, the game sure has an arcade-like feel.

Memories: I'm a huge fan of console- and computer-exclusive sequels of popular arcade games, such as *Diner* (a sequel to *BurgerTime*) for the Intellivision, *BurgerTime Deluxe* for the Game Boy, *Space Invaders Extreme* for the PSP, and *Tempest 2000* for the Jaguar. *Mappy-Land* certainly qualifies as a cool example of this subgenre.

Notable Quotable:
"A great sequel . . . The new scrolling and multi-level features really make this game shine. It's very easy to play, but is loaded with things to discover and ways to increase your score! It may not look like a revolutionary game, but it plays better than most . . . There's a lot to interact with . . . Starts out kind of slow, but the graphics and other features come together nicely . . . This game is addicting." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1989)

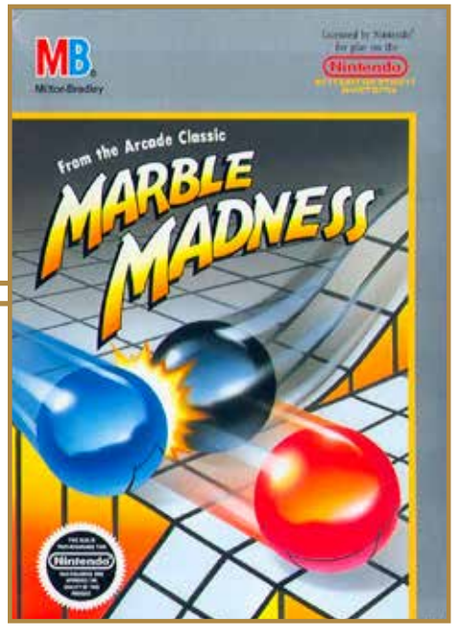
Notable Quotable:
"*Mappy-Land* is a primitive, repetitive platformer, but it does contain a certain charm that fans of the golden age of arcades will enjoy . . . There's not too much variety . . .

The challenge does ramp up, with faster enemies and more hazards, but it's disappointing to go through the same eight backgrounds. There is a tiny story that concludes at the end of the eight-level sequence, which at least suggests some progression, but completing four sequences simply loops the player back to the beginning . . . colorful art style and simple songs are appealing . . . enemies have different clothes in each stage . . . don't expect anything particularly sophisticated." —Lee Meyer (www.nintendolife.com), playing the NES game downloaded to the Wii U

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Marble Madness

PUBLISHER: Milton Bradley.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Maze/Racing; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.



In *Marble Madness*, one or two players guide a marble through six short, timed, increasingly challenging Escheresque mazes using gentle, precise, balanced touches of the control pad to keep the ball from falling into a chasm or off the side of the pathway. Marble movement is momentum based, and speed is of the essence since races are timed, but you must maintain a delicate touch. Marble munchers, birds, vacuums, acid slime, hammers, and other obstacles, including a steel ball that can bump your marble around, impede your progress, but you can get bonus points for finding short cuts and battling certain enemies. The tracks also contain ramps, tunnels, catapults, and tight corridors. The pseudo-3-D look of Atari's 1984 coin-op classic remains largely intact. Like the Genesis port, this version offers two control pad configurations—one that moves the marble 90° and one that moves it at 45° angles—compensating, at least in part, for the lack of trackball control.

Notable Quotable:
"This is one of the all-time coin-op classics faithfully converted to the NES . . . Graphically it's nothing to write home about—just like the original. Sonically it's fairly mediocre, too—just like the original. But in terms of gameplay it's streets ahead, with just the right balance between maddening difficulty and one-more-go playability . . . More than just a trip down memory lane . . . as fresh today as it's always been." —*Computer and Video Games* (October 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"If you're the sort of *Marble Madness* freak who collapses with excitement every time you see this game in an arcade then go for it. Unfortunately, for everyone else there's just not enough here to keep you going. There are too few levels, and to be fair the simple gameplay is showing its age a bit now . . . Some great soundtracks and a couple of rather appealing ones. Good FX . . . It's just like the original, but it's all a bit dated and dull now . . . It's a breeze. It just starts to get tricky enough on the last level. Tragically short." —*Total!* (February 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"The two-player option forces players to race one another to the finish and encourages sabotaging the opposing player's efforts in tight spaces through knocking them off of ledges or into hazards. The inclusion of the two-player mode helps to offset the largest problem with *Marble Madness*: its longevity, or lack thereof. The entire game can be completed in five minutes, and while each course takes a considerable amount of practice to master, the dearth of content quickly becomes glaringly obvious in a home release . . . an icon of a bygone era that retains its relevance through simplicity, playability, and sheer addictiveness." —NintendoComplete.com

SCANTERPUBLISHING

Insider Insight: Nearly 30 years before the Supreme Court ruled that video games are an art form, twelve-year-old-me discovered the coin-op classic *Marble Madness*. It was beautiful—the blue and red glowing trackballs, the soft 3D graphics, the creative gameplay. But what stood out the most was the melodic, catchy, and often nightmarish music pouring out of the machine. *Marble Madness* was one of the first games offering true stereo sound, which contributed greatly to its success. It had a recognizable theme and was indeed a work of art.

Years later I spotted the NES version of *Marble Madness*. I wondered if it included the arcade music and, if it did, how well did it translate?

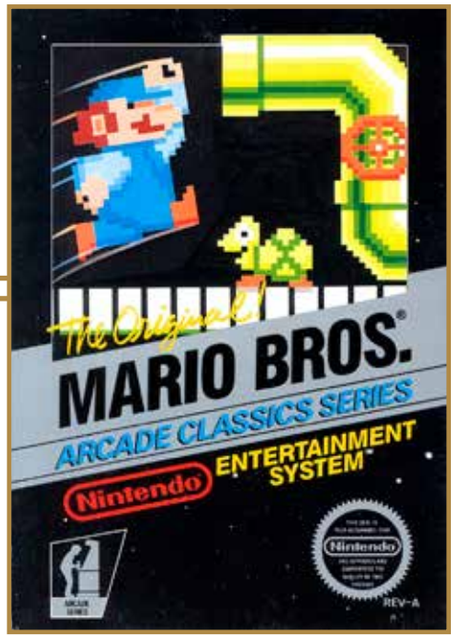
It delivered! It was comforting to hear the memorable melodies again. So much so that it inspired me to record a gaming mixtape. I knew the first track would be Level 2, Beginner Race—my favorite. The last would be Intermediate Race, a B-horror movie/sci-fi tune reminiscent of *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* with a dash of *Killer Klowns from Outer Space*. I plugged the cables into my stereo and recorded the songs to cassette. For filler I added sound bytes and music from other sources, including my trusty Commodore 64.

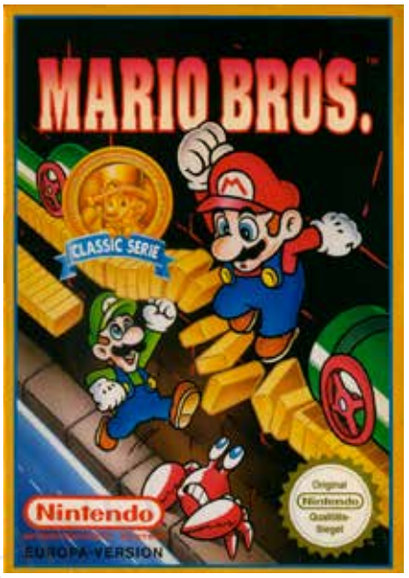
I was proud of the tape and listened to it mostly while driving. That cassette was magic. Unfortunately it was eventually lost to the hands of time.

In 1984, *Marble Madness* ambitiously opened the floodgates for video game music to excel. When I think of the soundtrack to my childhood it's not all Run-DMC, They Might Be Giants, and Bruce Springsteen—the NES sound chip will always be a significant part, thanks in a large way to *Marble Madness*.—Sean Tiedeman, director of *The King of Arcades*

Mario Bros.

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo.
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1986.





While Mario and Luigi are hard at work doing some underground plumbing, Shellcreepers (turtles), Sidesteppers (crabs), and Fighterflies begin coming out of the pipes. The brothers must knock these sewer pests into oblivion before the timer runs out. You control Mario, and a second player can join in as Luigi. After you defeat all the creatures you move on to the next level. The playfield is composed of seven platforms and a brick floor. To stun a creature, you must get directly under it and jump, effectively punching the platform it is walking on. While the creature lies motionless you hop up to where it is and knock it off the screen before it has time to recover. If it does get back on its feet, it will become faster and therefore harder to stun. You can stun or revive all the onscreen creatures simultaneously by hopping under a "POW" button that appears near the lower portion of the screen. In the super entertaining two-player mode you can work together or, better yet, sabotage one another, in part by bumping each other into creatures and fireballs. In later levels both players must be wary of Freezies, which spread out and harden, making the platforms slippery. This is a nice port of Nintendo's 1983 arcade classic (created by legends Shigeru Miyamoto and Gunpei Yokoi) which featured the debut of Luigi and established Mario (formerly Jumpman) as a plumber.

Memories: It makes me crazy when people shorten "*Super Mario Bros.*" to "*Mario Bros.*" when discussing the iconic side-scrolling platformer because it confuses things terribly. It also undercuts the greatness of the "non-Super" *Mario Bros.*, which is one of my favorite two-player games of all time. Back in the day I frequently played the game with my friend Johnnie at the Northeast Mall in Hurst, Texas. We cracked up so hard when we would trick the other player into dying that people probably thought we were high on laughing gas. I bought this port shortly after getting my NES for Christmas in 1987 and was not disappointed.

Notable Quotable:
"An NES port that's not perfect when compared to the 1983 arcade original, but one that is about as close as can be expected, with smooth gameplay and crisp graphics that do the original proud." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Mario Bros.* #91 on a list of 100 best NES games

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: We moved briskly through Stop & Shop, gathering up last-second provisions in full formal attire. We had just come from a friend's wedding reception and were running against the clock; the superstorm was imminent. Twenty-four hours later the lights flickered for only a second before giving way to darkness. Hurricane Sandy had made her presence known and would go on to inspire a broad span of emotions in us during her stay, from palpable fear at the height of her rage to lightheartedness and levity during our many sessions of "Would You Rather?" in the dark.

Three days later, our power was restored and for us, the storm had officially passed. All things considered we were extremely fortunate. We had escaped the onslaught without sustaining any serious damage and were able to begin moving forward again. For most people, their first inclination at that moment might have been to turn on the news or to log onto social media, but for us the path forward was a very simple one. We gave our thanks for surviving relatively unscathed, hooked up the NES to Michelle's stalwart mini-CRT television, and fired up *Mario Bros.* The two pixelated plumbers had been fixtures in our lives over the days and weeks prior to Sandy and we could think of no better way to restore normalcy than by resuming our quest to conquer their subterranean foes. — Team Mayh3m: Michelle Ireland and Matt Miller, video game world record holders, featured in the *Nintendo Quest* documentary

Insider Insight: It was a Saturday morning ritual. My wife, Susan, and I would have breakfast, make some coffee, and play the heck out of *Mario Bros.* Playing cooperatively in two-player mode was always good for laughs. After one of us successfully hit the bottom of a platform to bump a couple of the turtles upside down you'd hear, "You go over and collect the turtles! No, you go get the turtles, I got them last time, it's your turn." We'd go back and forth like this the whole game!

I had a blast playing *Mario Bros.* in the arcade. That version had an amazing sound system. When the frosty enemies would freeze the platform they were on, you'd hear this high-quality freezing sound that had a nice, liquid-like ramping effect to the apex of the platform freezing into solid ice. That sound sample, unfortunately, was missing in the NES version, along with the animated intermission screens. However, the NES game was compelling and held true to the original gameplay so I forgot about those missing elements.

As I write this, we are having controlled power outages by PG&E for fire prevention here in California. I said to Susan, "Let's try to play some *Mario Bros.* before the power outage." It seemed like decades since we played it together. She agreed and selected two-player mode, she as Mario and I as Luigi. The only difference between playing it now and back then is that it's even more hysterical now. We had so much fun laughing and trying to play cooperatively that it looks like we're going to start playing the game as part of our Saturday morning ritual once again! —Steve Woita, video game programmer and designer

Insider Insight: As an avid fan of arcade games, the idea of getting the latest and greatest arcade titles at home wasn't anything new in 1986, but certainly no one could deny how good NES ports of arcade games looked. The original *Mario Bros.* in particular caught my eye. The arcade game was one of the few machines in the entrance to my local mom-and-pop grocery store for months and months, draining quarters from me and my friends' pockets after school, on weekends, and during the summers of 1986 and 1987. Seeing the box for *Mario Bros.* staring back at me from store shelves immediately told me that the NES was a console that would have at least one game that I would thoroughly enjoy.

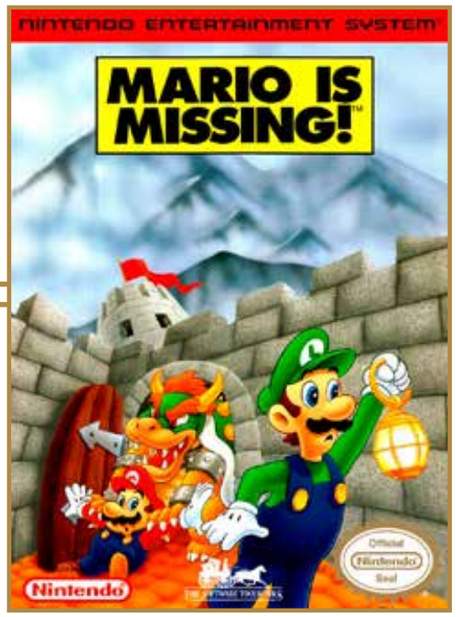
Something I didn't notice back then, but do now, is that the artist for the *Mario Bros.* box art didn't exactly follow the proper color scheme for our favorite plumber's attire. On the box Mario is wearing a light blue shirt under blue suspenders and a blue cap as opposed to the red shirt and cap he wears in the game itself. Clearly I've played this game enough to notice these minor details, but thankfully this mistake has no bearing on the gameplay.

As good as I was at *Mario Bros.*, I was never as good as my best friend growing up, and that fact was proven when we'd play two-player co-op and my game would inevitably end sooner than his. As a result of his superior gaming skills he would always claim player-1, which was Mario, naturally. That relegated me to player-2, Luigi, whose name wasn't even in the title of the game. I was just Mario's brother, after all. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mario Is Missing!

PUBLISHER: The Software Toolworks.
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Geography/Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.



This side-scrolling educational title featuring *Super Mario World*–style graphics puts players in the role of Mario's brother, Luigi, who must rescue Mario from Bowser and his Koopa buddies. This is done by exploring 14 cities, jumping on Koopas to retrieve stolen items, and answering questions pertaining to Beijing, Mexico City, Moscow, New York City, Tokyo, London, Cairo, and other locales. Trivia examples include "For what occasion was the Eiffel Tower Built?," "How tall is the Empire State Building?," and "Where is the Sistine Chapel located?" To help Luigi, he can use such tools as a computer, a map, a globe (for riding Yoshi), and a question mark (for asking people questions). The educational value of this game is marginal and the action is limited

in nature—Yoshi can't use his tongue, for example. However, collectors will want to grab it if the price is right since it's a tough game to find.

Notable Quotable:

"*Mario Is Missing!* isn't quite as good on the NES as it is on the Super NES—it's missing a bit of the graphical humor—but it packs in almost as much gameplay and educational value." —*Total!* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics . . . suffer from a lack of detail and a washed-out color palette, but the overall result is about as good as can be expected from a non-Nintendo Mario title on the NES. Although it's an educational game, *Mario Is Missing!* should hold the interest of younger players due to its relatively seamless combination of action and instruction." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are simply stolen from *Super Mario World*, but they really look crappy on the NES; except for a few nice colors there's nothing remarkable here . . . The music is nice, but nothing great . . . doesn't compare to classic Mario music . . . After years of great Mario games, hours of fun in front of the screen, this one was actually painful to play . . . cleared the game when I rented it in less than an hour . . . no replay value, no story, and almost no gameplay. The enemies don't even hurt you, for crying out loud!" — Super Luigi Bros (www.superluigibros.com)

Insider Insight: There is a reason why this game isn't called "Super Mario Is Missing." It's because there is nothing "super" about it! This game is so boring I'm surprised it got off the drawing board. It's apparent that it was made as a cash grab to capitalize off *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?* I remember renting this title when it came out and thinking, "Hey a new Mario game—this should be great!" Well, whoever was in charge of the Mario brand must have been asleep at the wheel because this game also put me to sleep. Even for a young Mario fan who had nothing better to do than play video games I was checked out. It's crazy to think that the game brings in such a hefty price tag these days—it sucks! —Chris Bores, The Irate Gamer on YouTube

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mario's Time Machine

PUBLISHER: The Software Toolworks.
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Educational/History/Non-Scrolling Platformer/Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

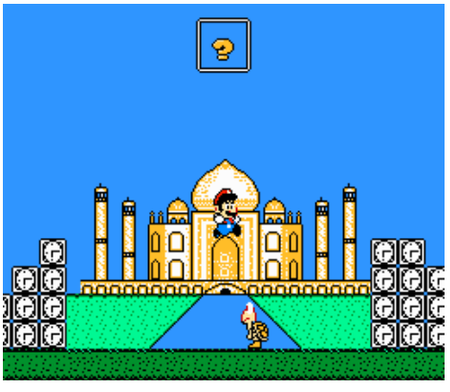
Bowser has stolen historical artifacts and placed them in his museum in this sequel to *Mario Is Missing!* Each of the seven rooms in the museum is a drastically simplified rendition of the nonscrolling platform game *Mario Bros.* In each room Mario must knock over three Koopa Troops (by head-bopping them from below) and kick them off the screen. This produces an artifact that must be taken via time machine to the correct place within the correct time period. There are 14 periods in all, ranging from prehistoric times up to 1989. Each period is a short, side-scrolling level containing I-blocks that release historical facts (which should be read and memorized) when bopped. Though nothing special, the NES version of the game, which includes a Yoshi-gets-kidnapped subplot, is actually preferable to the Super NES rendition, which is plagued by dull sequences in which Mario must surf across the ocean and collect mushrooms.

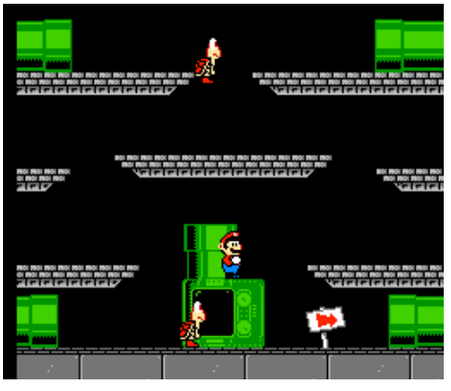
Notable Quotable:

"While *Mario's Time Machine* is a bit more solid than *Mario Is Missing!* (and a lot less glitchy), the frustrating gameplay, the terrible hint system, and the random spots required to return the artifact make for a terrible experience . . . As cool as the premise sounds, the only time I'd want to return to with this *Time Machine* is 1994, to stop this game from ever existing." —GameFaqs (gamefaqs.gamespot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"It's an excuse to learn about history while pretending you're having fun because you're playing a Mario game . . . the shortest, most inane and worthless stages Mario's ever been forced to frequent. The levels are literally about two screens long, filled with randomly placed blocks and enemies that, try their hardest, can never hurt Mario. I wouldn't doubt that the children this game supposedly caters to can craft better Mario levels out of their Duplo blocks . . . if you fail to put the historical relic in the historically appropriate place the game will scold you and send a bird to take the item away. This means you have to go all the way back and hit the Koopas again to get the item (much more frustrating than one would think). Despite trying to mix an educational Mario game with side-scrolling elements, *Mario's Time Machine* actually ends up worse than *Mario Is Missing!*" —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

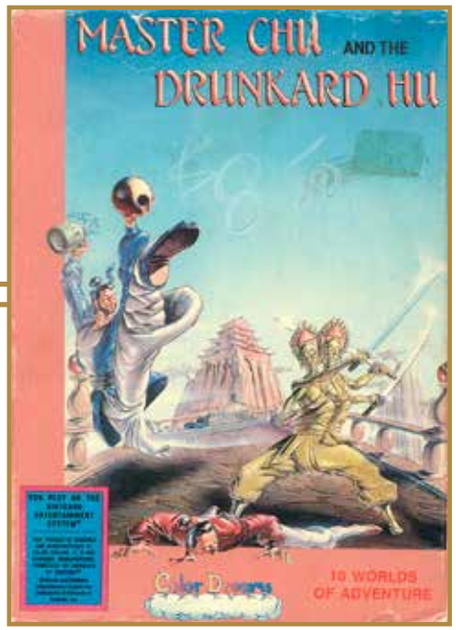




©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Master Chu and the Drunkard Hu

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams.
DEVELOPER: Joy Van.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.



The legendary Siamese Twin Shiva (a.k.a. the God of destruction) has cursed the village with evil spirits, meaning numerous enemies abound in the palaces and temples, including serpents, tarantulas, jaws of steel, great balls of fire, vampire bats, fire demons, and flowers of destruction. Chu and Hu, the latter of whom becomes a drunk after repeated failures to drive out Shiva's evil forces, must thwart this onslaught by running, jumping (by you pressing up on the d-pad), and shooting (fireballs) their way through 10 hostile worlds. You play as Chu, while a second gamer can join in as Drunkard Hu. Collecting various items (scrolls, amulets, keys, and the like) lets you become temporarily invulnerable, fire double or triple shots (the extra shots fire at an angle), unlock secret passages, and more. You can block projectiles with a fan or knife. Collecting all the yin and yang symbols in a level lets you progress to fight the boss. The symbols are hidden, but you can reveal them by shooting chests, vases, and the like. The baby blue cartridge screams Color Dreams, as does the poorly programmed game, which is plagued by shoddy collision detection, cheap-looking graphics, and repetitious music. You've got to love the odd name, though: "Master Chu and the Drunkard Hu" just rolls off the tongue. Unlicensed and rare.

Notable Quotable:

"A second-rate knockoff of *Kenseiden*, an excellent Sega Master System game . . . contains tons of glitches and strange enemies . . . There are eight total bosses, none of whom are remotely difficult or challenging . . . I hate the endlessly looping ten seconds of music, I hate the way Chu can stand on thin air and fall through solid objects, and I hate that such a cool name was wasted on a game like this." —Taylor Bell (www.somethingawful.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Your character moves sluggishly around the screen . . . each stage is relatively small . . . the game is somewhat generous with bonus lives, but it's cheap balance to compensate for fundamentally flawed gameplay . . . uninspired and repetitive . . . A good game should offer variety as motivation for encouraging you to play further, but this game has no surprises down the line . . . shoddy as an action-platformer with a weak weapon, a worthless defense mechanism . . . no prize in the visual department . . . dull black backgrounds . . . the only music you get for 99% of the experience is the same annoying fifteen-second looping stage tune and unmemorable boss track." —Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Insider Insight: Upon encountering the clearly non-child-friendly game moniker of *Master Chu and the Drunkard Hu*, you have to wonder—how did a title like that get past Nintendo's censors in the 1980s? Well, the answer is that it didn't, since *Master Chu* is an unlicensed game published by Color Dreams, a company perhaps second only to Tengen as a popular purveyor of non-Nintendo-approved games during the NES's heyday.

While unlicensed doesn't always mean low quality, unfortunately in this case the bumpy gameplay almost conveys a sense that the playable characters gulped down one too many rounds at the bar together. The controls are counterintuitive (you have to press "up" to jump, for example), enemy hits can be cheap, and invisible glitches abound. I wouldn't call the game an outright disaster, and parts of it even remind me of classics like *Rygar* and *Kid Niki*, but on the whole I certainly found it to be more frustrating than fun.

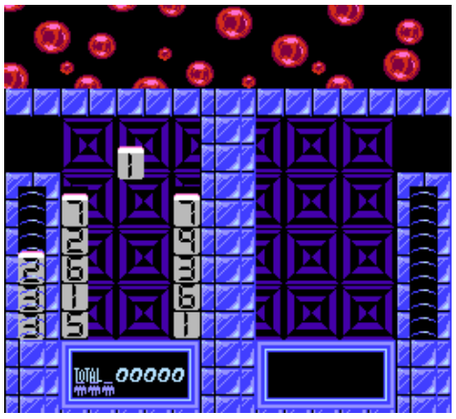
In fairness, I did only play *Master Chu* a short while; I rented it at Blockbuster once and tired of it quickly. So I didn't experience the game all the way through, and perhaps what I missed may have vindicated it to a degree. But I would have kept at it had I enjoyed it, and *Master Chu* just didn't do it for me. Nonetheless, if only for its sheer oddity, the title will likely continue to be long remembered with grinning bemusement by fans of the NES and its games. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Maxi 15

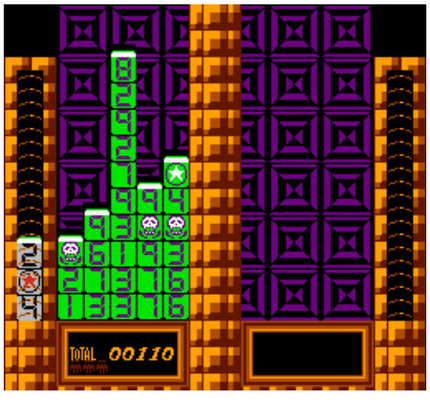
PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: American Video Entertainment, Various.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Game Compilation; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Maxi 15 contains 14 previously released games that you can read about in their separate entries in this very book (or in the first volume for titles beginning with A–L): *Chiller*, *Deathbots*, *Double Strike*, *Dudes with Attitude*, *F-15 City War*, *Krazy Kreatures*, *Menace Beach*, *Puzzle, Pyramid*, *Rad Racket—Deluxe Tennis II*, *Shock Wave*, *Solitaire*, *Tiles of Fate*, and *Venice Beach Volleyball*. In addition, the cartridge contains one unique game exclusive to this collection: *Stakk'm*, which is a playable, but unremarkable, *Tetris*-inspired action puzzler that offers two-player split-screen action. As numbered blocks fall one at a time from the top of the screen you make them disappear by placing them in vertical, horizontal, and diagonal rows. For a row to disappear it must consist of three to five identical or consecutive numbers. Treasure blocks, which act as wild cards, can be helpful, while death blocks simply get in the way (you can only eliminate death blocks by combining them with other death blocks). You can play the easy, normal, or hard difficulty level and turn background music on or off. You can also decide whether you want to see the next block ahead of time. This cartridge is unlicensed and rare.



Notable Quotable:

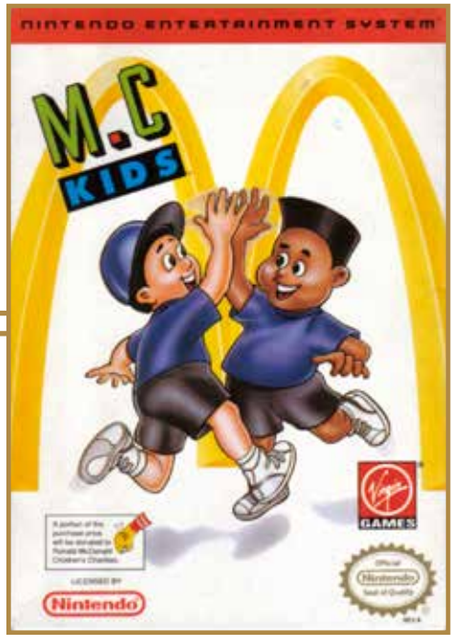
"If you are wondering why the wrestler Hulk Hogan was thanked in the credits, it was because he was the presenter for The MaxiVision Power Video Challenge, an infomercial of sorts for the 'MaxiVision 30-in-1' game cartridge. This cartridge was to feature 30 different games; however, it was trimmed down due to licensing and manufacturing issues and just 15 games were released on what is now known as the *Maxi 15* game cartridge." —Moby Games (www.mobygames.com)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

M.C. Kids

PUBLISHER: Virgin Games.
DEVELOPER: Virgin Games.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



The Hamburglar has stolen Ronald McDonald's magic bag and Mick and Mack, the two coolest kids in McDonaldland, must help bring it home. *M.C. Kids* is a surprisingly fun, surprisingly challenging game that is much more than a commercial for the McDonald's restaurant chain. Mick and Mack must make their way through McDonaldland, picking up and throwing blocks at rabbits, beavers, birds, robots, sea life, snow creatures, and other enemies, making sure to collect a specific number of cards (some of which are hard to find) in each stage. Gathering 100 golden arches initiates a bonus game, and there are a variety of activities throughout the normal game, including crossing icy bridges, riding conveyor lifts, bouncing on springboards, throwing snow at enemies, riding a boat, riding porous rocks (to get past lava), digging through sand (that is blocking your route), and floating on clouds (to reach bonuses and other items in the sky). A map for each world connects the levels. *Super Mario Bros.* fans should enjoy the game, though Mick and Mack, who also starred in *Mick & Mack as the Global Gladiators* for the Genesis, cannot jump on enemies to defeat them.

Memories: We rarely went to McDonald's when I was a kid, though I was intrigued by the television commercials featuring the Hamburglar and Mayor McCheese (his giant head made me slightly nervous). We were more of a Pizza Inn, Captain D's, and Dairy Queen family (usually just on Friday nights). Nowadays I hit up Mickey D's for their dollar drinks, fresh baked chocolate chip cookies, and the occasional McRib. The McFlurries are good, too. Writing this is making me hungry . . .

Notable Quotable:

"Who would've thought it'd be so hard to get to a conversation with that walking gumdrop, Grimace? How embarrassing—yet still fulfilling . . . For gamers looking for refreshing platform thrills on the NES, *M.C. Kids* is all that and an order of fries." —*Game Informer* (December 2003)

Notable Quotable:

"Combines the best elements of many platform games and has some great new ideas of its own . . . I particularly love the clever use of blocks throughout the game . . . The graphics are nothing spectacular, but the colorful backgrounds are consistent with McDonald's image. Don't expect a wonderful soundtrack, either . . . blippy and annoying theme tunes . . . gameplay is very good . . . the challenge is pretty tough." —*N-Force* (March 1993)

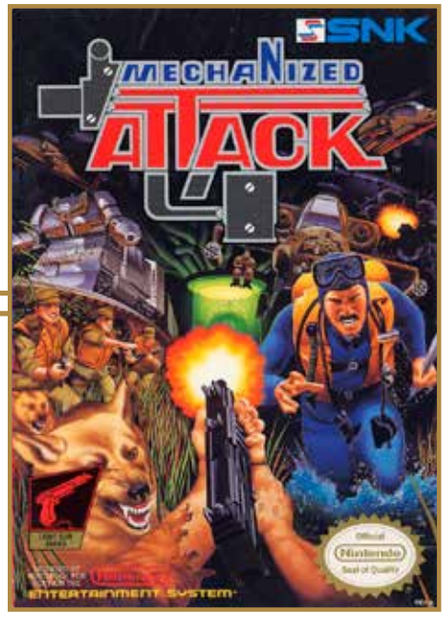
Notable Quotable:

"*M.C. Kids* lives and breathes *Super Mario Bros.* From the smooth play control to the general construction of each level, you keep forgetting you're not that little Italian plumber. There are no airborne or underwater levels, but the cart does pack some great features that *Mario* lacks, such as the spinner that literally turns your entire world upside down, and zippers, which enable you to unzip the wall of a level, climb out, and return to another area of the game . . . will tantalize you with its puzzles and secrets." —*GamePro* (January 1992)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mechanized Attack

PUBLISHER: SNK.
DEVELOPER: SNK.
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



A shooting gallery game, *Mechanized Attack* is based on SNK's 1988 arcade cabinet, which boasted a pair of replica machine guns and two-player simultaneous action. You, armed with an assault gun, a rocket launcher, and grenades, guide a cursor around the screen or aim with the Zapper gun, firing away at robots, rebel soldiers, helicopters, frogmen, gunboats, destroyers, attack dogs, and other enemies. Typically the Zapper is preferred in a game like this, but only the standard controller is capable of rapid fire, so you might want to go that route. There are no innocents, meaning you should feel free to fire away at anything that moves. The action scrolls automatically left and right through a variety of areas, including forests, airfields, land, seas, caves, and a train. You can grab power-up items by shooting them, including extra ammo and rockets, more grenades, energy drinks and first aid kits for recovering your health, 1ups, and bulletproof jackets. When it gets dark shooting flares lights up the night.

Notable Quotable:

"*Mechanized Attack* lost the look and feel that made it happen in the arcades . . . an *Operation Wolf* clone that didn't really do anything new. The gun makes the screen flash way too much . . . too much screen distortion when you hit an enemy." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"SNK's corpse fest may not be perfect, but at least it's a break from duck hunting, clay shooting, and *Hogan's Alley* . . . There's always at least three soldiers or robots or dogs for you to shoot on the screen at any given time, and the second you shoot 'em, they've already been replaced. I can't remember the last time a NES game forced me to concentrate as much as *Mechanized Attack* has. It's easy to get overwhelmed, but thankfully, plentiful continues will ensure you see the end credits in an afternoon or two. Perhaps the only improvement SNK could have made was a two-player option. Who wouldn't want double Zapper action? Nevertheless, *Mechanized Attack* is the rare Zapper game that actually feels like a game and not a tech demo. For that we should be thankful." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Insider Insight: The Zapper for the NES was an unusual way to play a game for its time. I started with the packed-in *Duck Hunt* game, but after a year I finally got my second light gun title, *Mechanized Attack*. It was a free game from a friend who upgraded to the Sega Genesis and was getting rid of his NES console and cartridges. To someone not familiar with *Operation Wolf* or other games like it, it was an awesome sight to see scrolling action after playing the single screen in *Duck Hunt* for so long. While it could be played using a controller and crosshairs, I simply had to play using the Zapper. I was awful at the game at first, but after playing it over and over, I began to memorize the enemy patterns and ammo drops to work my way farther into the game. It was quite a surprise when in the second level I shot an enemy, only for it to suddenly resemble a Terminator! The final boss was even more of a surprise! Strangely, the ending made no reference to the opposing force being robotic. Eventually I got to the point I could speed-run the game in under half an hour. *Mechanized Attack* may not be remembered by many today as a classic, but I recall it more fondly than *Operation Wolf*, a much more popular game. —Chris Leathco, blogger at Retro Gaming Roundup, author of *Afterglow* and *The Virtual Boy Game Library*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mega Man

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.

One of the most beloved platform shooters for any console, *Mega Man* was the first game in a popular series that would spawn five NES sequels, plus games for the SNES, PlayStation, and other systems. The game puts players in the title role of a small humanoid robot (created by Dr. Wright) clad in a round helmet and blue costume. Mega Man's job is to run, jump, shoot (left and right only), and climb his way through six obstacle-filled levels, each ending in a robot-gone-bad boss: Cutman, Gutsman, Iceman, Bombman, Fireman, or Elecman. After defeating a boss Mega Man will acquire that character's weaponry, such as fireballs or boomerangs. After beating the first six levels Mega Man must enter the last stage to face Dr. Wily, who is responsible for reprogramming the aforementioned robots to become evil. The game scrolls vertically as well as horizontally. *Mega Man* poses a formidable challenge, thanks in part to disappearing platforms and tough-to-dodge projectiles. Also each boss is vulnerable to another boss's weapon, so there's strategy involved. However, the health meter is long and continues are unlimited, making it highly playable. Selectable levels and weapons, sharp visuals, and compelling gameplay help make *Mega Man* an all-time classic. Now, about that horrible box art . . .

Memories: When the original *Mega Man* hit stores in 1987, I picked it up shortly after release because I had heard good things. I was not disappointed and played it often, though I never did beat it. I didn't buy the sequels as they came out because the gameplay seemed similar, and I figured I would rather use my hard-earned money to buy different types of games. When the *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* came out for the *PlayStation 2* years later, I eagerly bought it so I could play all the NES titles, plus a few others in the series.

Notable Quotable:

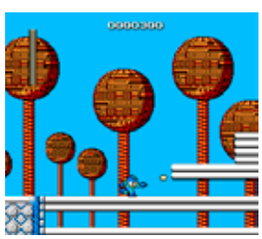
"When *Mega Man* finally hit American shores in the late '80s, Capcom couldn't have realized the gaming force it unleashed . . . one of the best examples of great graphics, amazing music, and near-perfect gameplay rolled into one cartridge. *Mega Man*'s unique approach is what initially made it so interesting to gamers . . . The permutations through *Mega Man* were many, giving the game great replay value. The original *Mega Man* is perhaps best known, however, for its staggering difficulty level. It's not only the hardest in the franchise, but one of the hardest NES games period." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Mega Man* the 30th best NES game on a list of 100

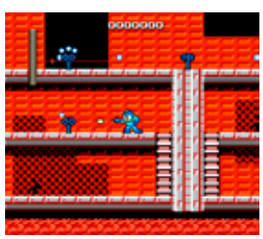
Notable Quotable:

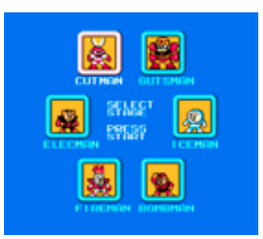
"If it never had any sequels, I'm sure we'd all easily call it one of the greatest NES games. However, it has a lot of flaws that its successors fix. Notably, controlling Mega Man is a lot more slippery than in later games. While future games have precise movement, Mega Man tends to slide an extra step or two when he stops running. This is especially annoying in a game with a lot of instant death pits and spikes . . . while *Mega Man* games are known for their difficulty, the original is too tough . . . It's easy to forgive *Mega Man*. It was the first, so of course the sequels would be more refined. The original laid the groundwork for an incredible series. But today it's the least enjoyable one to play." —Mike Minotti (venturebeat.com)

Insider Insight: One morning, when I was twelve years old and stuck at home with chicken pox, my dad tossed an unexpected surprise on my bed—the *Mega Man 2* issue of *Nintendo Power*. This was the first issue of the magazine released in Canada and it was sent for free to *Nintendo Powerflash* subscribers.

From the moment I laid eyes on the map to Air Man's stage I knew I had to play the game. Unfortunately, when I was recovered from chicken pox and at my local rental store, *Mega Man 2* was out of stock. The original *Mega Man*, on the other hand, was







SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

there. I'd passed by that game a hundred times, ignoring it due to the ridiculous box art and terrible screenshots on the back. But I figured, what the heck? The sequel looks awesome; perhaps the original was good, too.

From the first time I fired it up until my progress came to a screeching halt at the Yellow Devil I was in love. My friends and I eventually rented *Mega Man 2* as well, but I kept coming back to the first game until I got good enough to beat it. And then beat it again. I felt like I'd discovered a true classic that no one else knew about, and to this day it's one of my favorite games. —Greg Sewart, game developer, former Previews and Reviews Editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

Insider Insight: *Mega Man 2* was the first game that I bought after I got my NES in 1990, and *Mega Man 3* was one of the most anticipated games of my youth. But the original *Mega Man* game was almost mythical at the time. I never saw it for sale anywhere and none of my friends had it. It was well into 1993 when my friend Craig magically ended up with a copy. He invited me over to play it one day and I eagerly accepted his invitation. I could hardly believe that I was finally getting to play *Mega Man* 1!

Much to my surprise, it was jarring to play the original *Mega Man* after having played 2 and 3 so much. While the controls were pretty close to what I had come to expect, certain other aspects of the game threw me off. I understood that the game was almost six years old at this point, but that didn't change the fact that the music and graphics, while good, just didn't seem right. The biggest surprise was that the game had a score counter. I can only guess that it had something to do with keeping score being a staple of arcade games and this was Capcom's first original game specifically made for home consoles, and not an arcade port. Even though it took me a little while to get used to the differences, I did enjoy the game a lot once I borrowed it and dove into it more. As different as it may be from the rest of the series (relatively speaking), it is a true cornerstone of the NES. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

Insider Insight: The NES era was a heyday for Capcom, as clearly evident from not just the quantity, but the genuine quality of titles they produced for Nintendo's 8-bit hardware, and the *Mega Man* games were certainly no exception. They had a huge impact on me as a young aspiring artist, falling right in line with my love of animé and robots. Strangely enough, I don't remember actually playing the original *Mega Man* game until sometime after I'd already played the second, third, and fourth games in the series.

When I did finally get the chance to rent the game one weekend in the fifth or sixth grade, I was admittedly put off by things like the game's arcade-style scoring and the absence of Mega Man's canine robot companion, Rush. Further, as an artist I was absolutely dumbfounded by the game's cover design. What a mess! I couldn't even tell what game I was looking at. The whole thing appeared to be drawn with crayons and looked as though the "artist" had lost interest in the piece halfway through. While Mega Man's face was nicely rendered (albeit stylistically inconsistent), the character was dressed in yellow, poorly proportioned, and posed in an impossibly awkward posture, with palm trees swaying in a tropical breeze behind him.

Much to my relief the game bore little resemblance to the cover, and had fantastic sprite art with wonderfully imaginative environments and an amazing soundtrack. *Mega Man* wasn't quite as polished as its sequels, but its shortcomings made the later titles seem all the better. Unfortunately, though, that cover art was burned into my brain. I eventually learned that the design was a rush job by a non-artist working on the game's American localization in an attempt to address concerns regarding the super-deformed animé style of the original Japanese *Rockman* cover art. This type of scenario actually happened rather frequently during the NES era, but as far as I'm concerned the original *Mega Man* will always be the poster child for the difficulties of video game localization. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

Insider Insight: Like many a Mega Maniac who grew up in the 1980s, my first experience with the Blue Bomber was playing *Mega Man 2* at a friend's house. I was so enthralled that I assumed such a great game came from an equally great predecessor, so I went to Noble Electronics and rented an NES and a copy of *Mega Man* for the weekend.

What followed was several straight days of exquisitely painful delight. Mastering *Mega Man* with no passwords in an era when "save states" and "walkthroughs" didn't exist was brutal, but a young *Mega Man* fan like me clearly had a masochistic streak. I didn't even know the Yellow Devil was called that. On my crappy 17" color television he looked like a giant orange goblin who shot himself across the screen at you in spurts. Pause trick? No such luck. I had to painstakingly memorize the order of every piece of his body that flew at you from one side of the screen to the other and quickly get off one electric jolt when he was done.

This should have been the end of my love affair with *Mega Man* because the sequel took the things this game did and improved on them. However, there's still SO MUCH to love here. The music is among the best in the entire series. The boss battle, when I was fully powered up with all of the weapons, was a huge adrenaline rush. The vanishing blocks I now love to hate forced me to GIT GUD and learn through rote memorization, repeating each sequence until I could do it blindfolded.

Make no mistake that the first *Mega Man* game is a brutal, punishing affair, and understand that despite (or perhaps because of) the difficulty, the pleasure of handing Dr. Wily his ass at the end never felt so good. They say you never forget your first time, and I'll always remember the satisfaction of returning that rental and saying, "Let me know when you get a copy of *Mega Man 2*—I already beat this one." —Steve Juon (Mistah MegaManFan on YouTube), a professional writer with a degree in journalism from Iowa State University

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mega Man 2

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.

Cited by many retro gamers as their favorite title in the popular series, *Mega Man 2* improves upon the already winning formula established by the original game. Improvements include crisper controls; superior sounds; Genesis-quality graphics; two difficulty levels; a password feature for saving progress; a nifty introductory sequence; larger, more detailed enemies (with such names as Atomic Chicken, Robo-Rabbit, and Lantern Fish); and larger, more imaginative level designs. There are eight bosses (as opposed to six in the original *Mega Man*), each created by (instead of just reprogrammed by) Dr. Wily: HeatMan, AirMan, WoodMan, BubbleMan, QuickMan, FishMan, MetalMan, and CrashMan. Once again, by defeating a boss players will gain a new weapon, such as the ability to freeze enemies or throw tornadoes, metal blades, or bubbles. Obstacles to avoid or jump over, such as spikes and lava, return to help keep the action challenging. In addition, Dr. Light (formerly Dr. Wright) is on hand to provide three transportation items: a levitation platform, a jet sled, and an elevator. Level environments range from cloudy skies, to moving gears and conveyor belts, to underwater, to underground caves. Scoring was removed from the equation but no one seems to care.

Notable Quotable:
"This platform masterpiece is only beaten by the Mario series for sheer brilliance and ranks as a totally fantastic and highly addictive game!" —*Computer and Video Games* (March 1991)

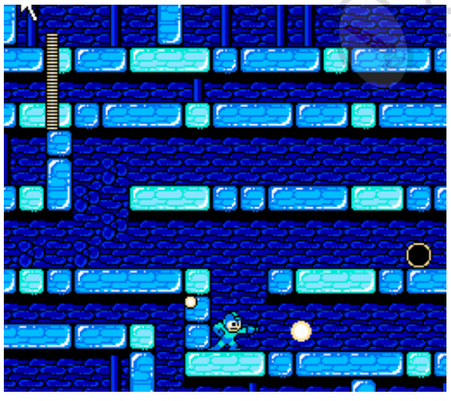
Notable Quotable:
"*Mega Man 2* is one of the best games I've played in a long time. It has a perfect blend of action and surprise that is usually seen only in games like *Super Mario*. The first *Mega Man* was a sleeper hit, but this one is even better, with plenty of new enhancements. Highly recommended!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1989)

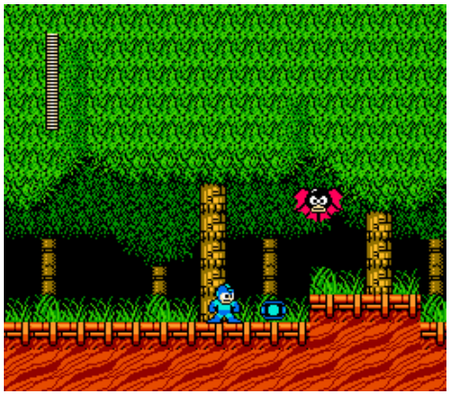
Notable Quotable:
"Unlike most Hollywood sequels, Nintendo games invariably match or even surpass the originals. Case in point: *Mega Man 2* . . . better graphics . . . takes longer to finish, even though it seems a little easier than *Mega Man* . . . colorful characters . . . A Disney-style cartoon run amok . . . Each robot is a unique problem so the game never becomes tedious." —*Game Players* (October 1989)

Insider Insight: *Mega Man 2* was the first game I bought for my NES. I had recently been looking through back issues of *Nintendo Power* and *Nintendo Fun Club*, trying to come up with ideas for a game to buy, and on the back of one of the issues was an ad for *Metal Gear*. I thought that game looked really cool because it was an "Army" game, and what young child of the '80s didn't love a good *Rambo*/*Commando*/*Predator* type of game? So, as I scanned through the video games at Target, I really wanted to get *Metal Gear*. But alas they didn't have it. However, I did remember reading an issue of *Nintendo Power* with an article about *Mega Man 2*, so I examined the box art, and on it was the fire-breathing dog—I thought that was one of the most amazing looking things ever so I had to get the game.

When I first played *Mega Man 2* I was really confused. It didn't just start up like *Super Mario Bros.* or *Castlevania*. Getting to pick what stage I started on was a whole new concept to me and I didn't know what to think at first. But after playing the game for a little while, I appreciated the fact that if one stage was giving me issues I could start again from a different stage, so I got to experience much more of the game right away than I would have if it played like *Mario*. This game

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





makes me happy every time I play it. – John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

Insider Insight: It was a night like most others in summer 2001. My friends and I were hanging out at my buddy Jay's house, taking full advantage of our semester break. On this particular occasion they decided to indulge in some beverages, which as the lone non-drinker of the group always left me on somewhat of an island after they were a few drinks deep. Fortunately for me I noticed that Jay had hooked his NES up to the living room television set earlier that day. At that point I knew that I would have an escape route for when the mood in the room became a little too festive for me.

As I perused the selection of games available my eyes locked in on an all-time favorite, *Mega Man 2*. I pulled it out of the dust sleeve, gave it the classic cleansing gust of breath, and it fired up immediately after its insertion into the hallowed gray console. As I was about to start my game I heard Jay's voice ring out from the couch behind me, "Matt, if you can beat this game you are the man!" Now, by this point I had known Jay for nearly eight years, and he had made painfully clear on several prior occasions his complete and utter disdain for watching others play video games. Thus, this turn of events took me a bit by surprise. Nevertheless, I accepted his challenge without a second thought.

It had been a few years since I last played *Mega Man 2* but the muscle memory remained intact. Eight destroyed robot masters, six conquered castle levels, and one groveling Dr. Wily later I claimed my beer-inspired mantle of "The Man." —Matt Miller, video game world record holder, one-half of Team Mayh3m, featured in the *Nintendo Quest* documentary

Insider Insight: During my senior year of college, my friends and I would get together regularly to play old school games from when we were kids. At first we mostly stuck with the Nintendo 64, playing games like *Pokémon Stadium*, *Mario Party 2*, and especially *NBA Hangtime*.

I eventually decided to invest in a Genesis, but after spending some time with that we wanted to move on to the next system. The subject of *Mega Man* came up and how none of us had played any of the games in the series. As such I took an original Xbox to a local video game shop and traded even for an NES. Unfortunately I had multiple issues with the console and had a hard time finding a copy of *Mega Man* that was in a poor college kid's price range.

Ultimately we gave up on the idea of finding any of the *Mega Man* games released for the NES and decided to take a modern approach. The *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* had come out recently, and this seemed like the perfect answer to our problem. I purchased it online, and by Friday, with beers in hand, we were on the couch trying to figure out which game to play first. Something about *Mega Man 2* jumped out at us.

Fast forward three hours and we were still on the second level. We went into the game blind and were completely confused as to what to do about beating certain levels. Slowly we learned that there was a puzzle to figure out regarding which levels needed to be played first to beat specific bosses faster. Game over after game over and we finally started making some progress. This progress seemed to take forever, though.

A month later friends had come and gone, leaving my house frustrated and discouraged. We could not beat certain parts of the game, which seemed even more impossible after a few beers. Fortunately, after about three weeks and a lot of yelling later, a friend and I finally reached the end of the game. No way would I have had the patience to do that when I was a kid.

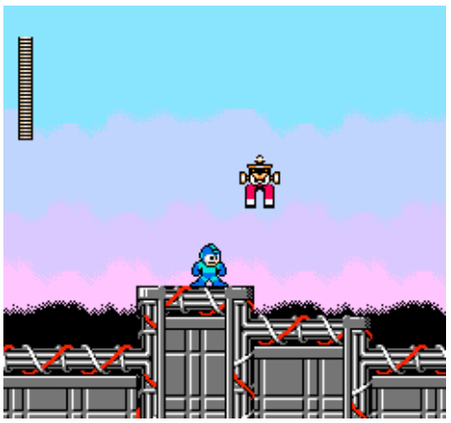
After getting that final hit on Wiley as the weird green alien I felt a sense of accomplishment that I had not felt since I was young. It was weird putting this much time and effort into a video game that was already almost 30 years old, but it was a great feeling to beat it and an even better memory to have, since most of those friends I yelled at the TV with have moved away. — Alex Thompson, PopNerdTV Producer

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mega Man 3

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

Another stellar title in the iconic series, *Mega Man 3* gives gamers more of the same type of platform shooter action as the first two games, but there are eight new bosses: Magnet Man, Snake Man, Needle Man, Hard Man, Top Man, Gemini Man, Spark Man, and Shadow Man, each thematically fitting of the level they are in. As in the first *Mega Man*, battling the robots in the correct order (stages are selectable) is important for acquiring the weapons (lasers, needles, magnet missiles, and the like) needed for the next battle. New to the series is Mega Man's helpful dog, Rush, who, when his weapons box appears, can be turned into one of the following machines: a springboard for high jumps, a submarine to keep Mega Man alive underwater, or a jet for flying. In addition Mega Man has a new move. He can now slide, which lets him enter narrow passageways and dodge attacks. Capcom largely stuck with a successful formula here.



Notable Quotable:
"*Mega Man 3* is a winner from beginning to end. Not only do you get the excitement of the old games, you get new options and more than enough to battle! Looks great and plays even better!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"*Mega Man 3* is a difficult game to sum up. On its own it would have been pretty damn good. Unfortunately, given that Capcom hardly seems to have done anything but tweak the past formula (*Street Fighter II*, anyone?), it's difficult to wholeheartedly recommend. A few more changes and it would have been great. Take note, Capcom." —Nintendo Land (formerly at www.nintendoland.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Each level is superbly crafted with its own unique looks and feel. I never would have thought a level could be based just on snakes—or tops—but they pull it off! My favorite is Gemini Man's level, as you start out in space fighting interesting floating-eye enemies and penguins and then head below the surface to track down the boss! Many levels also have awesome mini-bosses, my favorite being killer kitty. The bosses themselves are also fun, albeit somewhat on the easy side . . . The one exception is Shadow Man." —Retro Game Man (retrogameman.com)

Insider Insight: The NES started my lifelong love of Capcom. When I picked out games at a rental store my young mind instinctively sought out the boxes with purple borders, as they would often turn out to be some of my favorite games. A lot of that had to do with Mega Man, a character I had fallen in love with from the games and the *Captain N: The Game Master* animated series.

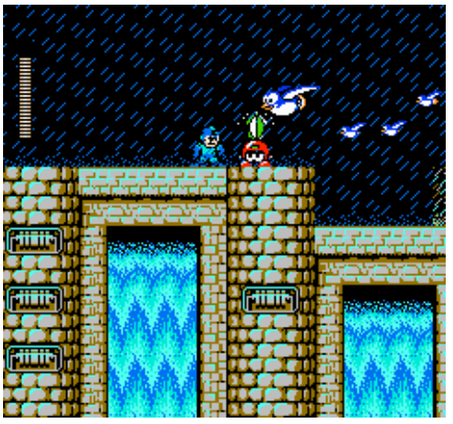
We mostly rented games as opposed to buying them, but it normally worked out for us, since there was a rental shop directly across the street from my grandparents' house. It changed names and owners over the years, and in 1999, when everyone was infatuated with the new 3D consoles, I made a bold proposition to the then-new owner to buy their copies of *Mega Man 3* and *Mega Man X3* for $10 apiece. To my surprise my offer was accepted. I raced home to ask my parents for the money and then went back to complete the transaction.

Sometimes I look at my copy of *Mega Man 3* and feel bad because, in an odd way, I felt like I had stolen something from someone who had just become a small business owner. However, as most people in my small town were only interested in Nintendo 64 and PlayStation games, perhaps my home was the best place for that copy of the game—there was barely a week that went by that I didn't finish it at least once. —Blair Farrell, owner and content generator for Comic Gamers Assemble, author of *The Web of Spider-Man Games: The Amazing and the (Not So) Spectacular*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mega Man 4

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

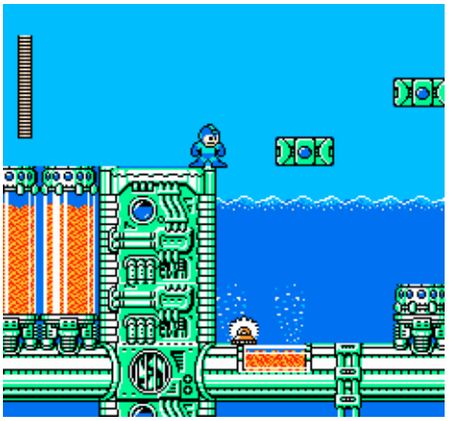


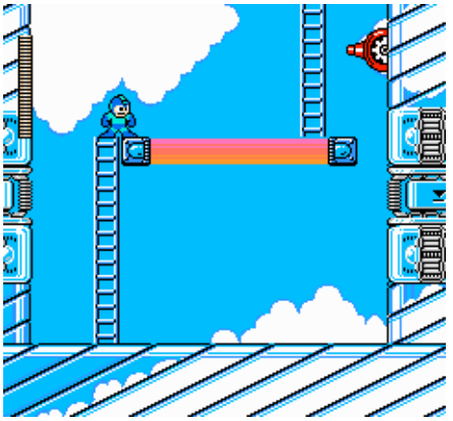
Mega Man 4 features a new villain called Dr. Cossack as well as an introductory origin sequence, but it plays a lot like the first three games in the series, which is a good thing for diehard fans. Mega Man maintains his abilities to jump, shoot, climb, and slide, the last of which was introduced in *Mega Man 3*. As in *Mega Man 2* and *Mega Man 3* there are eight new robot masters to battle, in this case Pharoah Man, Toad Man, Bright Man, Dive Man, Ring Man, Drill Man, Dust Man, and Skull Man. When defeated, each villain releases a selectable weapon for Mega Man to equip, such as a rain flush, a dust crusher, a skull barrier, or a dive torpedo. Rush the robot dog returns from *Mega Man 3*, offering Mega Man the same helpful tools: a springboard, a submarine, and a jet. New to the series is Flip-Top, Dr. Light's cybernetic assistant who appears from time to time offering power-ups. Also new is the ability to charge Mega Man's Mega Buster arm cannon for more powerful shots (a trait that would appear in most follow-up games), a balloon adaptor for creating small floating platforms, and a wire adaptor for pulling up on a wire to ledges and ceilings. By this point in the iconic series, which remains popular today, some gamers were getting tired of the well-worn formula, but there's no doubting the quality.

Notable Quotable:
"A high quality and very taxing platform game with great graphics, but it's absolutely nothing new." —*Nintendo Magazine System* (July 1993)

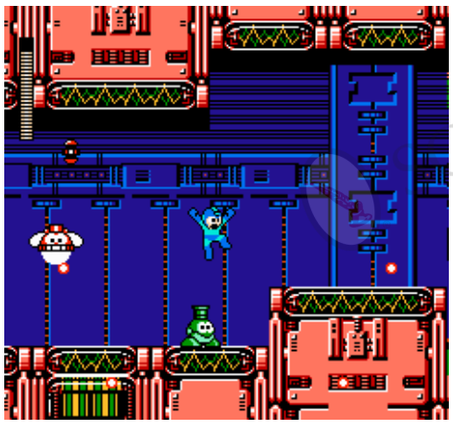
Notable Quotable:
"*Mega Man 4* continues the tradition—crazed robot baddies, good character graphics, great background art, and warped, mechanical music. When you have a good game why make radical changes? Capcom sticks to the blueprints in *Mega Man 4*—guaranteeing happiness for *Mega Man* fans everywhere." —*GamePro* (December 1991)

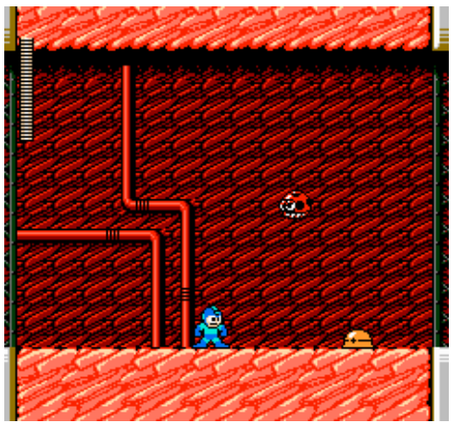
Notable Quotable:
"While you could say that this game is just another *Mega Man* adventure, the attention to detail that Capcom is pumping into the series just keeps getting better. There are new surprises, and the graphics have reached a new high . . . The music is good but gets repetitive rather quickly. I love the new power-ups like the wire arm . . . The worst problem with *Mega Man 4* is that some of the weapons and bosses are recycled from the previous games." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1992)





©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Insider Insight: I remember seeing *Mega Man 4* on the cover of *Game Players* magazine as a kid and being SOOO excited to discover that there was a new *Mega Man* game coming out. What were the new Robot Masters going to be? What kind of new weapons would we get equipped with? As I opened the magazine and read about it, though, I felt a little . . . underwhelmed. Toad Man? Skull Man? Pharaoh Man? Really, is that the best that they could come up with? While I was still excited, part of me felt disappointed, and I didn't go out of my way to get the game.

Even in adulthood I would see *Mega Man 4* at Software Etc. or *FuncoLand* and never buy it, because those initial feelings always crept into the back of my head. However, in late 2014, my buddy Dave Rivera was doing a giveaway on his Gamer Geek Nation page on Facebook. All we had to do was guess what his favorite NES game was and he would give the person who answered correctly a copy of *Mega Man 4*. I usually don't go for these kinds of contests, but the thought of getting a free *Mega Man* game intrigued me, so I threw in a few guesses. Lo and behold I did guess the correct game (*Astyanax*) and I did get a copy of *Mega Man 4*!

Through that I started friendships with Dave and the owners of Game Bros. in Houston: Clint Dollens and THE Greg Honeycutt. I held my very first charity live stream at Game Bros., which led me to team up with the crew that organize and run Gaming4Guts. As icing on the cake, winning the game sparked a new interest for me in getting heavily back into collecting and loving *Mega Man*. Aside from introducing the Mega Buster weapon the game is pretty standard for the series, but it will always be special to me because of what it brought into my life. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

Insider Insight: In summer 1992 I was firmly in *Mega Man* mode. The preceding months had seen my conquests of *Mega Man 2*, *Mega Man 3*, and *Mega Man* respectively, and I was eager for another challenge. *Mega Man 4* was next in my crosshairs, and fortunately for me my local video store had a copy available for rent.

The bulk of the game played out like its predecessors, with plenty of challenge but nothing insurmountable. The final encounter with Dr. Wily, on the other hand, provided an epic struggle that thoroughly tested the limits of my gaming will. Wily's disappearing act coupled with his difficult-to-dodge attacks gave me absolute fits. At age twelve, my general tendency was to focus heavily on offense to finish a boss battle as swiftly as possible. However, in this particular scenario that was basically the recipe for inefficiency and death.

After hours of basically running headlong into a brick wall, a change in tactics ultimately paved the path to victory. Specifically, I swallowed the medicine and opted to take a more conservative approach by sharpening my evasive maneuvers while simultaneously becoming more selective with my charged Pharaoh Shots. After that adjustment I finally began to see consistent progress. Further bolstering the results were the observations gleaned from each defeat, such as recognizing which of Dr. Wily's appearance spots on the screen provided the highest potential for a successful offensive strike and getting a more precise feel for the brief window of time in which his hitbox remained at any given position after his image had disappeared. When the battle finally concluded, it was easily one of the most rewarding endings and credit roll sequences that I had witnessed to that point, due largely to the amount of effort expended and, more importantly, the tactical lesson learned.

Less than twenty minutes after I had finished the game and turned off my NES a thunderstorm hit our area, killing the power. All I could think of was how relieved I was that I overcame that final battle with Dr. Wily before the opportunity to do so was taken from me. —Matt Miller, video game world record holder, one half of Team Mayh3m, featured in the Nintendo Quest documentary

Mega Man 5

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

By the time *Mega Man 5* hit store shelves, most NES aficionados were firmly entrenched in the series' fantastic formula: run, jump (on platforms, some moving, some disappearing), climb up and down ladders, shoot (left and right) at enemy robots via the arm cannon, dodge obstacles (lasers, fire, enemy projectiles, bottomless pits, and the like), and grab tanks to replenish energy. Bosses in this installment, which looks and sounds great, include Charge Man, Napalm Man, Gyro Man, Stone Man, Crystal Man, Wave Man, Star Man, and Gravity Man, each with a different selectable weapon to take and use on the next stage. Flip-Top and Rush make return engagements to help players traverse tricky areas, but this time Rush can only turn into a springboard and a jet. The mega buster weapon returns from *Mega Man 4*, but it can now be used to blast through walls to find hidden power-ups and secret passages, which is cool. In addition, Mega Man can ride a super arrow to scale high walls, and he can search for letters spelling out MEGAMANV to unlock a powerful new ally: an attack robot bird named Beat. The game is markedly easier and less frustrating than the first four titles in the series, making it ideal for those new to the franchise.

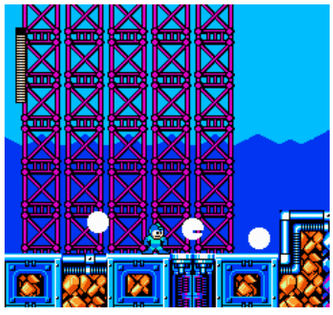
Notable Quotable:

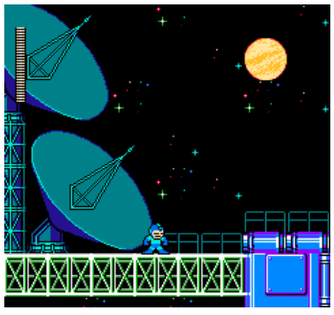
"A nice update to the old series . . . long levels and hard bosses . . . The graphics are cute, and some of the new enemies are hilarious . . . Each sequel looks better than the last." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1992)

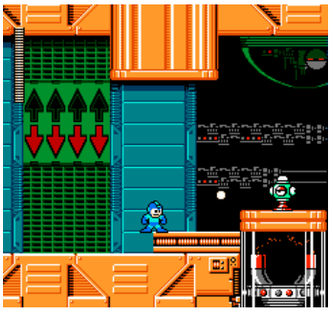
Notable Quotable:

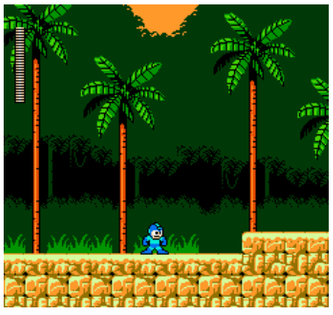
"*Mega Man 4* was not a bad game, but its reception was mixed. Many of its gameplay additions brought unforeseen consequences that slowed down a tightly paced game. Apparently it was enough for Capcom to rush a sequel into production . . . Why *Mega Man 5* was an NES game and not for the then-new SNES is a mystery, but at least it gave the NES another good title . . . The Robot Masters this time around are far more interesting in their design and powers than the previous game . . . I like the bosses, but their weapons are disappointing . . . fantastic level design . . . one of the easiest in the series. Aside from the incredibly strong Mega Buster, extra lives drop far more frequently . . . short on new ideas but doesn't need them. What it lacks in innovation it more than makes up with solid execution." —ClassicGames.Net (www.classic-games.net)

Insider Insight: In 1999, for some unexplained reason my local Wal-Mart put out a complete copy of *Dragon Warrior* for sale. I've never been a big RPG fan, but I thought it was cool to see an NES game on the shelf long after the store stopped carrying them. One day, when I was doing some back-to-school shopping with my family, I wanted to show the oddity to my brother. To my surprise *Dragon Warrior* was gone, but in its place was a sealed copy of *Mega Man 5* for just $20. *Mega Man* remains one of my favorite video game franchises today, but I only ever got to read about part five in the pages of *GamePro* magazine. I excitedly picked the game up and told my mom that we weren't going home without it. *Mega Man 5* is an okay game, but it's easily one of the weaker NES entries in the series. To me, though, it will always hold a special place in my heart because of the extraordinary circumstances of how I found it. It was also the first *Mega Man* game on the NES that I owned. —Blair Farrell, owner and content generator for Comic Gamers Assemble, author of *The Web of Spider-Man Games: The Amazing and the (Not So) Spectacular*









©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mega Man 6

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Mega Man 6 sticks to the tried-and-true formula of the previous *MM* titles as gamers run, jump on platforms (some moving), climb up and down ladders, blast enemy robots via a trusty arm cannon, grab energy tanks, and dodge lasers, spikes, fire, and bottomless pits. In a new storyline which evokes the popular fighting games of the day, the mysterious (if familiar looking) Mr. X employs a robot fighting tournament to unleash eight killer robots upon the world: Blizzard Man, Wind Man, Knight Man, Plant Man, Centaur Man, Flame Man, Tomahawk Man, and Yamato Man, each of whom Mega Man must defeat to beat the level and gain a new weapon. As usual, each boss fits the theme of his level, such as Blizzard Man's foreboding but beautiful frozen terrain and Plant Man's lush jungle surroundings. In addition there are now mini-bosses. Rush the robot dog is back, but this time he can transform into a jet pack for launching Mega Man into the sky and body armor for enabling Mega Man to punch through walls. Beat is back as well (unlockable by finding the letters BEAT), and so is Flip-Top. The last NES entry in the series, the game looks and plays the most like *Mega Man 5* and is easier than the first game.

Notable Quotable:
"Capcom considered the NES obsolete at this point and refused to publish the game in the United States. That's where Nintendo stepped in and published the game itself . . . considered by many to be the last worthwhile NES release." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Mega Man 6* the 58th best NES game

Notable Quotable:
"The platforming was challenging, the Robot Masters were interesting . . . some of the new features like the charge shot finally felt tuned for most every level . . . interesting story . . . The level design is predictable, the bosses offer less challenge . . . the power-ups feel like the barest variations on past power-ups . . . still enough here to make it an enjoyable platformer." —Keenan McCall (twinfinite.net)

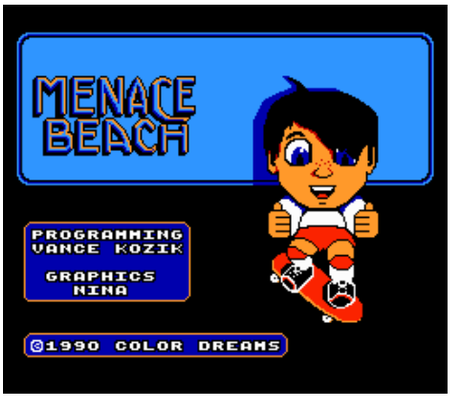
Notable Quotable:
"As with *Mega Man 5*, you get the sense Capcom's designers were really struggling to bring something, anything new to the table with yet another game on the same hardware. But by golly, they tried. *Mega Man 6* introduces a number of small elements to keep the *Mega Man* formula lively, ranging from a new basic power for Mega Man (a jetpack) to branching stage paths in which secrets have been tucked away for curious explorers. As one of the final games ever released for NES, it also quite unsurprisingly has some of the best music and graphics on the system, and unlike *Mega Man 5*, the extra weapons you collect along the way feel useful and fun. The fatigue of relentless near-identical NES sequels tends to color this game negatively among fans, but in hindsight it stands out as one of the more underappreciated chapters in the classic *Mega Man* saga. —Jeremy Parrish (www.polygon.com)

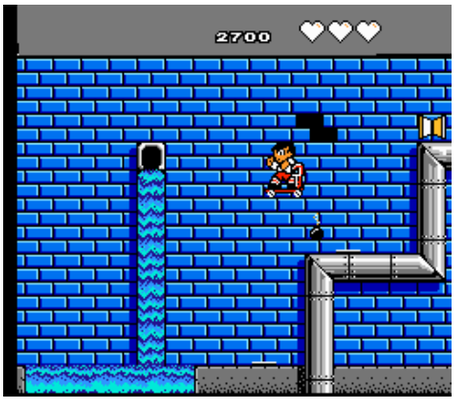
Insider Insight: You can't mention *Mega Man* to many retro fans without getting a positive response, and deservingly so. The Blue Bomber had a fantastic run of games on the NES before getting an upgrade and landing on the SNES and other consoles. Most people praise them for their fun gameplay and great tunes . . . except for this one for some reason. I've heard so many people talk about how it's the weakest installment in the series and I can't for the life of me figure out why. This game is so fun, and it's my personal favorite in the series. The first time I came across it was as a teenager, several years after the end of the NES's lifecycle. I had played some *Mega Man* previously and enjoyed it, but I instantly fell in love with *Mega Man 6*. The music is great, the levels are fun, and the addition of the Rush Power Suit and Rush Jet adapter are really cool. If you've disregarded this one as a subpar *Mega Man* experience I strongly suggest you give it a second look. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Menace Beach

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams.
DEVELOPER: Color Dreams.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.





In *Menace Beach*, you control a cool dude named Scooter who rides a skateboard from left to right, jumping over obstacles and battling such enemies as frogs, birds, ninjas, piranhas, Elvis impersonators, sumo wrestlers, and evil clowns. Bad guys throw bottles and bombs from crates, windows, and manholes, but Scooter can grab these items and use them as weapons (wrenches are similar, but are only found in sewers). In addition, Scooter can punch, do spin kicks, grab balloons (for floating), and get boosts from Squirt the fire hydrant and a frog named Froggy. He also gets flung into the air by springs. His job is to rescue his chained-up girlfriend (!) whose clothes gradually rot off (!), all the way down to her black bikini underwear (!) late in the game. This odd sequence of events is illustrated through cutscenes, where the girl chastises Scooter for not rescuing her quicker. The action takes place in beach towns, piers, caves, and sewers. In 1995, Wisdom Tree retrofitted the game with a religious theme and released it as *Sunday Funday*. Needless to say no clothes rotting off in that version. Unlicensed and rare.

Notable Quotable:

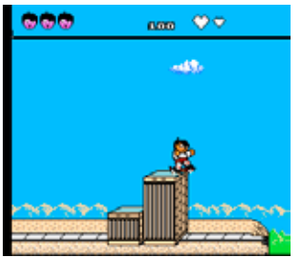
"Rarely have I taken such an immediate dislike to a game's protagonist . . . The controls are awful, the levels are awkward messes of lumped-together elements . . . frustrating, impossible to avoid hazards, it's repetitive, and it's just not any fun to play. I don't think it's quite objectionable enough to get into my all-time top five worst games ever, but I hate it with a pure, unclouded venom nonetheless." —VGJunk (retrovania-vgjunk.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"You get a lot of warning signs that *Menace Beach* is going to be a terrible game. For starters, there's no actual beach. It's also developed by Color Dreams . . . The final straw has to be the story, in which a pre-teen kid appears to be having a romantic relationship with a fully-grown woman . . . Despite all of the kooky enemies *Menace Beach* is a fairly straightforward action game. You are always riding a skateboard, so movement is quick and imprecise . . . You'll see a lot of repeated themes and ideas, not to mention bad guys and obstacles . . . a sub-par action game that is devoid of any real good ideas." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

Notable Quotable:

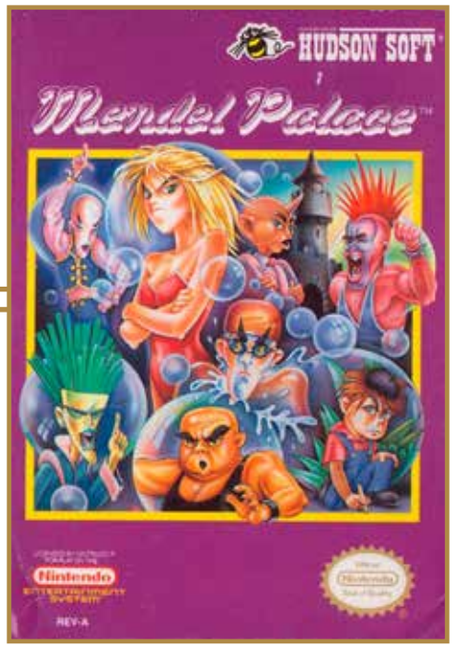
"*Menace Beach* was awful enough when it had fourteen other games to hide behind, but now that the spotlight is completely upon it, let us all be like Ma Barker and run for the hills . . . The controls for skating around are too slick and greasy, which is a shame, because skating is all you do. You skate to progress forward, you skate to attack, and you skate under items to pick them up. Besides the occasional ninja, Elvis impersonator, or sumo that you have to attack to progress the levels are barren. Random hands will pop up out of sewers or windows to toss you items, but the backgrounds are bland, lifeless renderings of boardwalks and factories. The game looks bad, sounds worse, and promotes creepy voyeurism à la the continuous undressing of your girlfriend at the beginning of every stage . . . If Scooter controlled responsibly and not like a drunken carouser this game would be beatable in five minutes, and it would highlight the lack of anything actually occurring in the levels." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mendel Palace

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: Game Freak.
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Action; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



With its pastel colors, nonscrolling, grid-like playfield, and simple yet addictively challenging gameplay, *Mendel Palace* offers a distinctly old-school experience. The objective is to destroy all of the enemies on the screen by pushing them into walls. You do this by shuffling the floor tiles they're standing on, which shoves them backward and makes them fall down. Keep at it until you shuffle them into a wall. Shuffling tiles also reveals treasures and power-ups, such as suns that shuffle all the tiles on the board or time panels that put extra time on the clock. Many tiles contain stars, and grabbing 100 stars grants players an extra life. The basic gameplay remains the same throughout, but there are eight types of enemies to mix things up, each of which behaves in a different way, such as spinning, sliding, or jumping. The storyline revolves around a dreaming girl named Candy who is being held captive by her dolls in the titular palace. *Pengo* fans may enjoy *Mendel Palace*, which was developed by Game Freak, a key company in the origination of the Pokémon franchise.

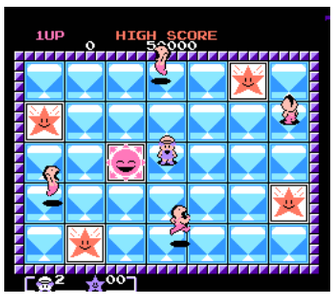
Notable Quotable:

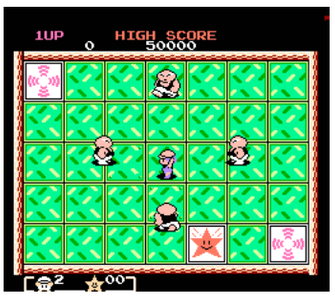
"An extremely fun, if chaotic, puzzle game . . . It sounds dull, but is something that is unique and fun in practice. There was nothing else like it at the time and it is still a very unique puzzle game experience. It can also get pretty challenging as you progress . . . you will face bizarre doll enemies that dance like ballerinas or swim through the air. The game gets even more fun when you are able to fight bosses in the shoes of a doll who can sumo stomp or do kung fu . . . Things can get extremely crazy extremely fast . . . a great start for a great developer, though it has long been forgotten." —Ashley Davis (www.destructoid.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Bon-Bon doesn't move very quickly. While this doesn't deprive the game of proper pacing, it does become aggravating when you're being chased by a gang of plastic monstrosities . . . for a game with adorable presentation and cute concepts it has a tendency to be ruthless. In some stages you'll shuffle all of your opponents away with a sun tile. Before you can arrogantly dust off your hands you'll notice that the sun has revealed dozens of doll generators, and that the foes materializing from those portals are super pissed because the stage's hidden time limit has expired. In other stages you'll start off in an area enclosed by block tiles and surrounded by Chucky-like miscreants. In either case it's likely you'll die at least once . . . For every difficult stage there are about two or three easy-to-moderate ones that you can fly through . . . wonderful array of enemy types . . . fresh and lightly entertaining." —Joseph Shaffer (www.honestgamers.com)

Insider Insight: My sister and I used to play *Mendel Palace* all the time when we were younger. Despite our love for the game, it is straight out of the "games we grew up with that nobody ever talks about" file—which is a shame, because it's great fun! The unique playstyle and quirky characters kept us playing for hours on end. Though we were never very good at it (and honestly, I don't think we ever beat it), it's one we'd pop in frequently for some multiplayer fun . . . Fun, that is, until it would go south, as one of us would accidently (or deliberately) send the other one careening into an enemy with no chance of escape. Many a fight broke out over this, but it never deterred us from coming back to it again and again. This is one little-known title that seriously deserves more attention than it gets. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

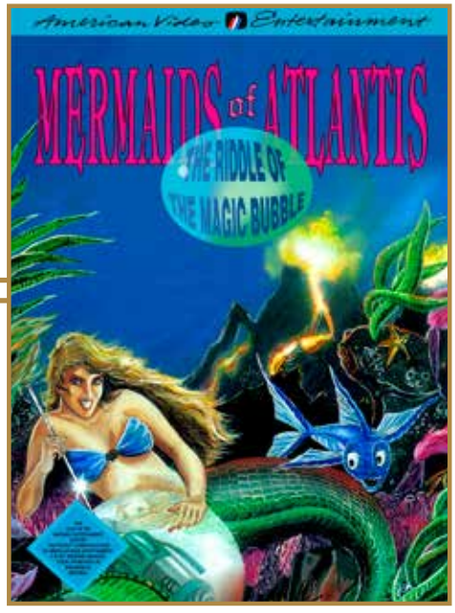




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mermaids of Atlantis

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Computer & Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

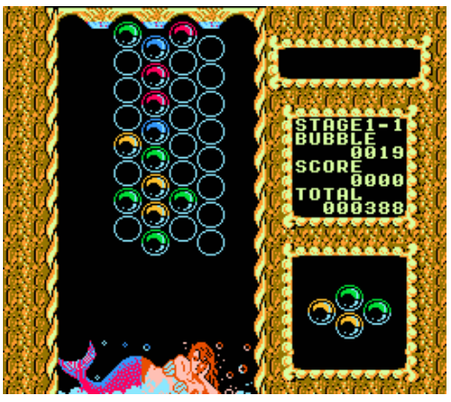


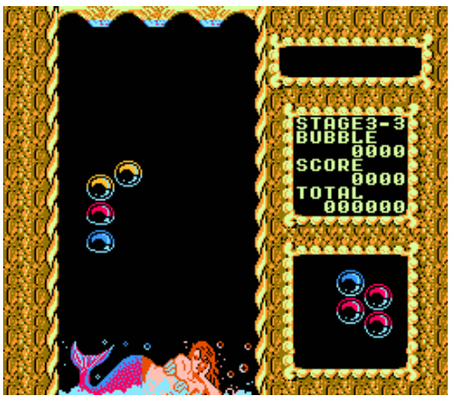
Mermaids of Atlantis is a sanitized version of Panesian's *Bubble Bath Babes*. The naked woman at the bottom of the playfield has been changed to a mermaid wearing a bra, there are now three difficulty settings, and you can begin from any stage. Groupings of four bubbles rise from the bottom of the playfield into formations up above and you can arrange them and move them into place. When four or more bubbles of the same color touch they will burst, clearing them from the screen, which is what you want. Spelling out MAGIC (letters appear in certain bubbles) is a helpful strategy, and randomly appearing mystic bubbles turn surrounding bubbles into the same color. Two-player split-screen mode provides some nice competition. Includes colorful intermissions that describe the history of the mythical underwater city of Atlantis, which you won't find in *Bubble Bath Babes*. Unlicensed and rare.

Memories: I've always been into mermaids, as they're typically portrayed as cute and exotic. I'll never forget the semi-spooky *Night Gallery* episode called "Lindemann's Catch" (1972), where a fisherman catches a mermaid and wishes for her to be human. I like the *Splash* (1984) feature film as well, starring Daryl Hannah as the mermaid who walks ashore. And don't get me started on *The Little Mermaid* (1989), one of my favorite animated films of all time. As such, I'm really glad *Mermaids of Atlantis* is a solid game with pleasant visuals.

Notable Quotable:
"Freed from its seedy roots, the underlying gameplay of *Mermaids of Atlantis* is allowed to shine through, and while its concept of color-matching objects is nothing innovative, the game executes it well, making for an enjoyable and challenging experience." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Stands out a bit in the terribly overcrowded genre that draws its inspiration from *Bust-A-Move*, *Columns*, and of course, *Tetris* . . . the game sounds exactly like a million others, but when you actually play it, you see that it does have some new wrinkles that make it worthwhile . . . Like the best of this genre, it's pretty easy to pick up but hard to master in a hurry . . . sports relatively advanced, colorful graphics . . . a game I can recommend with some confidence . . . provides quite a bit of simple (if highly derivative) fun." —Jeff Cooper (www.digitpress.com)

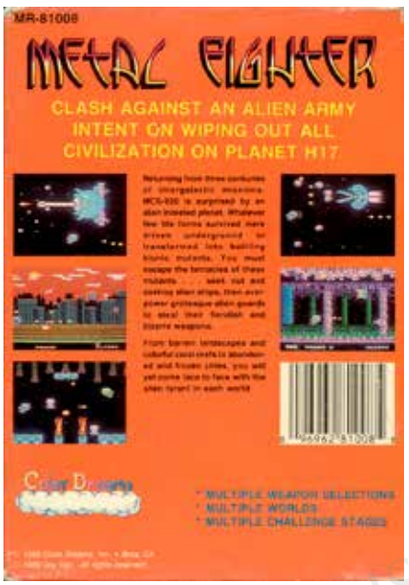




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Metal Fighter

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams.
DEVELOPER: Joy Van.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



The bulky ship you pilot looks like a baby chick with a giant head, but *Metal Fighter* is a decent side-scroller that is more playable than most Color Dreams games. The ship walks and jumps along the ground, shooting at an odd assortment of colorful bionic mutants (with names like mushroom pod, helifish, stingly, mutangel, squidimus, and spidercraft), which frequently make the screen very crowded. Some enemies move straight up and down, but most move in random patterns. You'll shoot missile launchers, spacecraft, and bosses as well while progressing through such areas as barren landscapes, coral reefs, and abandoned and frozen cities. By grabbing an "F" power-up the ship can fly (you'll spend the vast majority of the game in the air), which is unusual, since in most side-scrolling shooters the ship can fly from the get-go. Other power-ups offer speed, extra plasma balls, double lasers, multi-angle fire, and circular fire. Holding down the button for a few seconds and releasing it unleashes a more powerful attack. Unlike most shooters with forced scrolling, *Metal Fighter* lets players turn back and shoot to the left. Unlicensed and hard to find.

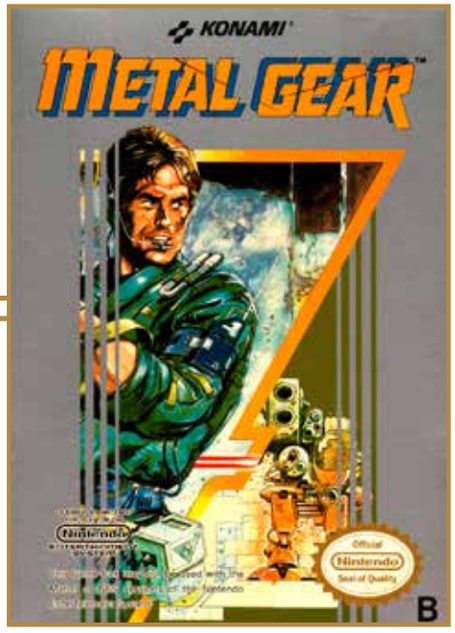
Notable Quotable:
"Pitiful . . . poorly designed, generic-looking enemies . . . With the exception of some parallax scrolling in the background, the lifeless graphics and music could easily be mistaken for a subpar first-generation effort. It's pathetic games like this that helped make the name Color Dreams synonymous with low quality." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Strives to be different. I can understand Sachen's desire to stand out from the then-overcrowded shooter genre, but devolving it as they do in *Metal Fighter* is certainly not the way . . . If it doesn't take more than a few seconds of game time to acquire [the] flying power-up, why wouldn't the ship just begin each stage in flight? . . . Your ship gets three hits before it dies, but there's usually no way to tell how many times you've been hit throughout the level. There were several times I'd be cruising through a stage, thinking I'm doing well, and without warning my ship exploded. This is partially because the enemy fireballs/projectiles blend into the backgrounds of the stage . . . not all bad. When you've got a good upgrade and enemies are consuming your deathblows by the hundreds it's a good feeling." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Metal Gear

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Stealth/Action/Adventure; 1 player.
YEAR: 1988.



The forerunner of *Metal Gear Solid* for the PlayStation and an influential game in the stealth genre, *Metal Gear* for the NES is a port of the original MSX2 game. You play the role of Solid Snake, a marine who must infiltrate five heavily fortified, overhead view strongholds throughout Outer Haven, which is a South African nation ruled by ruthless dictator Colonel Vermon CaTaffy. Snake can acquire guns, a rocket launcher, plastic explosives, land mines, and other weapons by finding them in trucks and enemy storehouses, and by taking them from certain enemies, but hiding and sneaking past guards and soldiers is his primary strategy. If he's spotted by enemies infrared sensors are tripped. He'll communicate with headquarters and rescue hostages, and certain areas require number-coded key cards to enter. Other helpful items in this complex, though popular, game include body armor, a bomb blast suit, binoculars, a transceiver, a mine detector, a flashlight, a compass, rations, and an oxygen tank, among others.

Notable Quotable:

"Requires strategic planning and careful thought . . . gameplay is very challenging as it's much more than just 'shoot and kill,' then moving on to the next screen. The graphics are crisp and colorful . . . Our one, albeit small, complaint is that as you move from screen to screen, there are a couple of seconds where the screen goes blank as it 'resets' for the next area . . . a solid piece of entertainment." —*Computer Entertainer* (August 1988)

Notable Quotable:

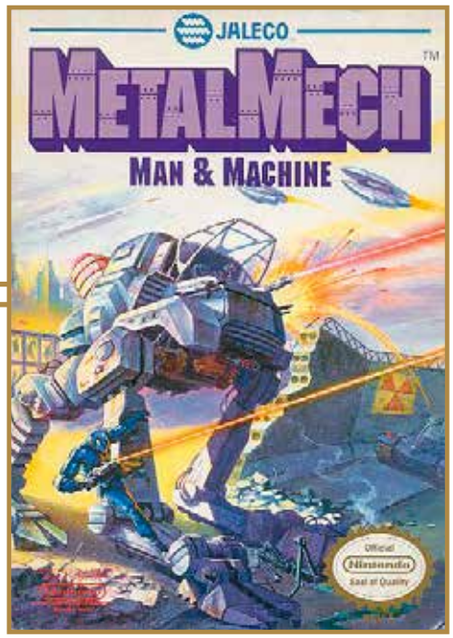
"*Metal Gear* shows much promise for future Ultra Games entries. It attempts to move beyond the standard run/jump/shoot format favored by the vast majority of NES software publishers. It also exploits the desire of the player to acquire newer, deadlier technology through the course of a game. These strengths combine to make *Metal Gear* a potential superhit that, unfortunately, is sabotaged by its own weaknesses." —*Computer Gaming World* (October 1988)

Insider Insight: *Metal Gear* is awesome, as are its sequels (even if the story becomes a bit convoluted), but my most vivid memory of this game is the advertisement that simply states "Gear Up." All of Snake's gear is on display, from guided missiles and high explosives, to infrared goggles and oxygen tanks; the gameplay images were impressive, but my imagination ran wild with all the possibilities this cornucopia of equipment must offer in the game. From a child's perspective this ad seemed to be in every game magazine for years, though I suspect it was closer to several months. I don't recall any other print ads for *Metal Gear*, and if there were, they were completely overshadowed by what I consider to be the greatest video game print ad of all time. This was my version of Ralphie's Red Ryder ad, and I now have a 36" poster of it hanging in my office. —Andy Slaven, freelance writer, coauthor of the *Video Game Bible*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Metal Mech

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



In *Metal Mech*, the intrepid Tony Martin must single-handedly thwart an alien invasion. The invaders in question are mechanical in nature and include such creatures and vehicles as skull tanks, dragonflies, dogs, ninjas, blowfish, blobs, hovercrafts, and top-walkers, the last of which hang upside down and walk on the ceiling. As Tony, you pilot a slow-moving, three-legged Metal Mech, which can stomp on or shoot enemies. You can rotate the firing mechanism to fire forward, at angles, and straight up, but sometimes you must exit the alien vehicle to navigate tight spaces. Out-of-mech Tony packs a pistol and can jump, ride elevators, and climb ladders and fences, all a part of making it through six levels of play: City, Towers, Sewers, Atlantis, Alien City, and Alien Queen's Mothership, where Tony dons a jetpack and wields a sonic boomer. Each level is nonlinear and has things to discover and collect, including smart bombs, extra lives, shields, a spacesuit, fuel, and a cannon. To exit a level and advance to the next stage, you must find a key.

Notable Quotable:

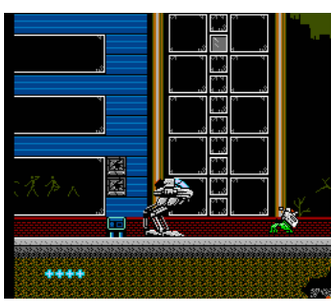
"The control of the Mech is extremely clunky. Controlling the man is somewhat easier . . . I kind of wonder why we even need the Mech in this game, since the man has much better control and is easier to use. In *Blaster Master*, the tank is invulnerable while Jason is running around outside of it. But in *Metal Mech*, enemies will continue to attack the Mech, even after you leap out, and it will still take damage . . . *Metal Mech* also tries to be non-linear, like *Blaster Master*, but most of the time you're just climbing up and down ladders within the same area and not really exploring much . . . feels very unfinished and sloppy." —Flying Omelette (www.flyingomelette.com)

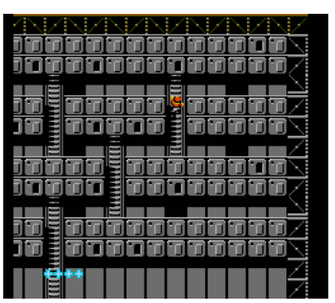
Notable Quotable:

"Incredibly boring, and the task at hand is daunting and strenuous . . . the levels are massive and enemies respawn like crazy . . . the second level alone is enough to destroy anyone's sanity—I can't express how long it took me to find that stupid key! It is a shame, because the rest of the game is somewhat decent (except for the terrible music), the mech looks pretty cool (it is surprisingly large on screen, but this comes at a price and it is very clunky to control), and the last level, where you only control Tony, certainly came as a pleasant surprise (despite horrible controls) . . . poor level design and messy gameplay . . . more difficult (and frustrating) than it could and should have been." —The Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:

"While it doesn't look like it at first, *Metal Mech* has a lot in common with *Blaster Master*. Both feature large worlds and also allow you to jump out of your vehicle. Tony even resembles Jason, although thankfully he isn't as frail . . . probably has the largest maps in any NES game . . . The game's size is impressive, but it also works against it. The key to the exit can be literally anywhere. There are no hints or guidance either . . . clunky tank controls . . . the entire game feels clumsily designed . . . Tony and his mech have separate life bars, and unlike *Blaster Master*, your tank can be destroyed . . . trying to finish the level as Tony [is] not likely. He cannot withstand gunfire as well as the tank and can be torn to shreds in seconds. This will either send you back to a checkpoint or the beginning of the level, depending on your progress. It is even possible to end up in situations where it is impossible to reenter the Mech. These kinds of oversights are huge and affect the game tremendously. The game is a chore and could have used fine tuning . . . more frustrating than it is worth." —ClassicGames.Net (www.classic-games.net)





© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Metal Storm

PUBLISHER: Irem.
DEVELOPER: Tamtex.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

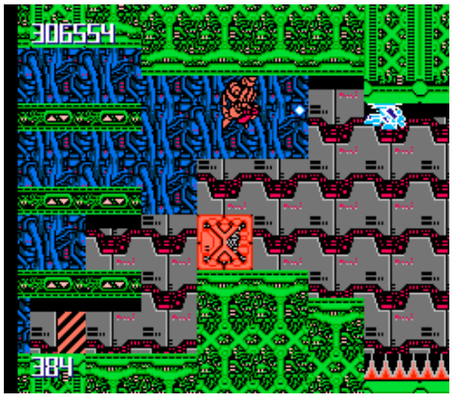
The year is 2501. A defense mechanism stationed on Pluto has malfunctioned and is systematically destroying all the planets in the solar system. To reach the rogue weapon's self-destruct device players, at the helm of an M-308 Gunner battlemech, must walk, jump, and shoot their way through four stages of tanks, surveillance robots, defense gates, laser beams, and other enemies and obstacles. Armor, extra time, shields, power beams (which increase the width of the player's laser), and other items to pick up make this challenging task manageable. One unusual aspect of the M-308 Gunner is that it allows players to strategically reverse gravity, sending the mech upward to walk on the ceiling. Other notables in this fun game include multilayered backgrounds, nice animation, a peppy soundtrack, and a garish color scheme consisting of various shades of purple, peach, orange, yellow, red, green, and blue.

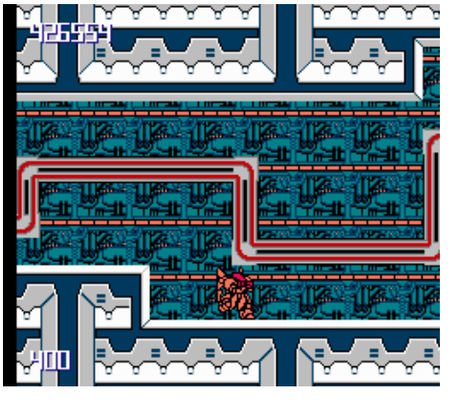
Notable Quotable:

"*Metal Storm* is the perfect example of how to take an exciting theme and produce it correctly from beginning to end. You get amazing graphics, decent sounds, and enough pulse-pounding interaction to keep interest well into the action . . . One of the best NES shooters to come around in a long time . . . The bosses are easy and there aren't enough power-ups—otherwise a great playing game . . . terrific shooter." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The music actually seems to reflect the difficulty and general nature of the area you are traversing through. The first level has a somewhat cheerful tune flowing through it, while the second level's music is much more daunting and evil . . . The sound effects are sort of cheesy—expect many pings and pongs scattered about . . . This is a fun game that will keep you at the edge of your couch . . . On Normal mode it's a pretty tough game—there are a couple of bosses in particular that will force you never to blink, for if you do, you'll die in an explosive deathly fashion . . . Expert mode is not for the weak-willed, the weak-thumbed, or even those people who believe that sanity is a virtue" —Random Access (randomacc.net)





Insider Insight: The first time I saw *Metal Storm* was in an unlicensed strategy guide called *Super Strategies for Nintendo*, published by Consumer Guide. I purchased the guide, which covered 20 or so recently released NES games, at a school book fair in the fourth or fifth grade, despite the fact that I didn't own a single game actually covered in it. This was a few years before my parents let me subscribe to gaming magazines like *Nintendo Power* or *Game Pro* and internet access wasn't yet a household staple, so for me it was a great way to find out about new games.

Out of all the games covered in the guide, *Metal Storm* was by far the one that stood out the most. I really wanted to play it, but at the time I couldn't even find it in stores. I finally got to play the game sometime later when some friends rented it for the weekend. It was a thing of beauty, with amazing graphics, innovative gameplay, and excellent play control. Unfortunately, it would be decades before I'd get to play the game again. Since I couldn't find it in the wild, *Metal Storm* was one of the first games I ever bought off of eBay. I was elated that it looked every bit as smooth and polished as it had the first time I played it all those years ago. Pro tip: use the Game Genie codes "SNKEPULO" and "OOKEZLVP" to enable the original intro cinematic that for some reason is disabled in the North American release. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Metroid

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/Adventure; 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.

Players control the agile Samus Aran, who runs, jumps, and fires short-range beams while on a mission to track down parasitic Metroid organisms in this open-world adventure. By branching out and finding rooms containing power-up items Samus can equip the following strategic, fun-to-use weapons: bombs, long beam, ice beam, wave beam, jumping screw attack, high jump, missile rockets, varia (which makes Samus lose less power when hit), and maru maru (which lets Samus roll into a ball to access narrow passages). Samus can also find tanks for storing energy. The game is anything but a standard platform shooter. Rather, it's an epic adventure taking place in a vast, nonlinear underworld of connecting rooms (via doors and elevators), confounding dead ends (or are they?), and exotic enemies—some that crawl, some that fly, and some that swoop down. Samus is nicely animated, the creatures look cool, and the platforms in the underground caves Samus explores are a nice variety of colors, designs, and textures. The sound is great as well, with catchy, memorable, upbeat music (by Hip Tanaka) to complement the daunting nature of Samus's lonely task. Players truly get the sense that Samus is alone and lost in a hostile alien environment—the unadorned black backgrounds actually add to the game's creepy atmosphere. This groundbreaking game requires exploration, backtracking, and, for many gamers, creating a map to make it to the monster bosses Kraid, Ridley, and the final showdown with the Mother Brain. Thankfully a password system makes it possible for players not to have to complete this sprawling science fiction quest in one sitting. The game has a famous surprise ending—SPOILER ALERT!—in which Samus is revealed to be a woman. Along with *Kid Icarus*, *Metroid* was the first video game cartridge to include a password feature for saving progress.

Memories: As I've stated, I typically prefer linear, action-oriented games to open-ended, nonlinear adventures with lots of exploration. However, I picked up *Metroid* (as well as *The Legend of Zelda*) early in 1988, based on good things I heard about it, and I'm very glad I did. I never beat the game without cheating, but I did make it pretty far, and I enjoyed it every step of the way. Sure, I'd get frustrated when I got lost and had to backtrack, but it had such a terrific atmosphere and such cool weapons that I kept plugging along until I'd eventually make progress. This is a hauntingly beautiful game that truly makes you feel lost in space.

Notable Quotable:

"An absolute blockbuster of a game . . . hugely playable . . . very gratifying to play. I really do think Nintendo is a match for Sega if it can continue producing software of such high standards." —*Computer and Video Games* (July 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"Solid and well-constructed adventure . . . The graphics are outstanding, and the play action is full of surprises around every corner . . . enemies are many and imaginatively varied, and Samus turns out to have quite a few interesting tricks up his sleeve to cope with his enemies . . . don't miss this one." —*Computer Entertainer* (September 1987)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: One weekend a friend and I decided we were going to rent *Metroid* and play through it from start to finish. We started early and tag-teamed the controller for what felt like an entire day. We went in completely blind. We had our graph paper and we were building maps as we went. It took forever. We played late into the night, never once writing down a password because we were going to run through the whole thing.

At about two in the morning I was making the long climb up toward the door to Tourian, where the Metroids and Mother Brain lay waiting for us. We'd been playing for quite a while so we decided to get a drink. I paused the game, headed to the kitchen, and grabbed something from the fridge. When I came back into the living room I picked up the controller, and I swear neither of us touched the console. The screen went black. We stood there in silent horror as the title screen appeared and the opening music began to play. We didn't beat *Metroid* that night, but I fell in love with the genre during that session. —Greg Sewart, game developer, former Previews and Reviews Editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

Insider Insight: In summer and fall 1987, when I was at my peak NES obsession before owning my own console, I would stare at and read the backs of the game boxes while at my local Walmart. Back then NES games were not always shrink-wrapped and instead were hung up on store racks using hang tabs on the back of the boxes. This meant that anyone could open the game box and look inside. I was so interested in *Metroid* that I was compelled to open the box and read the manual right there in the store! I pored over the contents of the manual every time I visited—in bite-sized chunks to avoid getting caught. Then I would put it back in the box after two to three feverish minutes of reading. I couldn't understand how it was possible to have such an open-world setup in a video game. The concept was so drastically different from what I was familiar with playing games like *Donkey Kong*, *Galaga*, and *Ms. Pac-Man*. Arcade gaming had not prepared me for this! Once I finally got my NES and my *Super Mario Bros.* obsession waned *Metroid* was one of the first games I rented and then finally owned. It was everything I imagined and more when I was slyly reading the manual in my local Walmart. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

Insider Insight: In 1987, *Metroid* and its sister game, *Kid Icarus*, represented a lot of firsts for the home console industry. Both games were among the first to utilize a password game save system. Both games were among the first to feature massive, non-linear world layouts with multi-directional scrolling. Both games were among the first to reveal multiple endings based on player performance. But the difference between the two games lies in their distinctly different moods. Whereas *Kid Icarus* is a light-hearted, cartoonish romp reminiscent of *Super Mario Bros.* set in mythological times, *Metroid* is the opposite.

Metroid is a futuristic, *Alien*-esque adventure—dark, ominous, and foreboding. The deeper the player delves into the seemingly endless and convoluted caverns of Planet Zebes the more somber and serious the music becomes. The environment is laid out in a stark, unforgiving manner that easily loses the unsuspecting player. In an era where nearly every other video game's objective was simply to move right and jump until you win, *Metroid* was a 180-degree departure. What *Metroid* accomplished so deftly was the merging of shoot-'em-up and puzzle elements in a way that allowed the player to adopt various strategies to accomplish a single goal. And while *Metroid* certainly wasn't the first video game to feature a female protagonist, Samus Aran is one of the earlier, more memorable examples.

What truly makes *Metroid* amazing is the musical score. So much so, in fact, that I felt compelled to record the BGM for each distinct area onto one of those old dayglow-colored Memorex cassettes and play the soundtrack on my boombox. Yep, I was a chiptune kid before I was even aware of the term. To this day I believe *Metroid* has one of the overall greatest soundtracks ever developed. The depth and intricacy of each track pushed the NES soundcard to its absolute limit. —Brian "CIVICMINDED" Lesyk, cohost of the Pass The Controller gaming show

Insider Insight: Few games have had an impact in my life like *Metroid*. Without a doubt it is my favorite video game of all time. In fact, it is the game that most inspired me to become a developer. I first played *Metroid* in autumn 1989 at a cousin's house and was immediately entranced. Being a somewhat introverted kid growing up, and at the time coping with my family's recent cross-country

© Schiffer Publishing

relocation, I found myself easily relating to protagonist Samus Aran's isolation and loneliness in her quest to eradicate the devastating bio-weapons being harvested by space pirates on the planet Zebes. There was something so incredibly surreal about the way *Metroid* seemed to defy the 2D platforming conventions of the time. The game was just so amazingly innovative from both a creative and a design perspective.

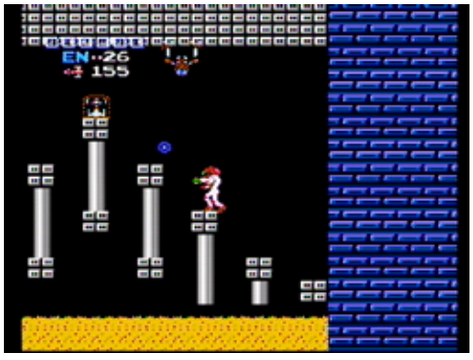
After playing so many other platform games on the NES back in the day, merely being able to scroll left was mind blowing. The morph ball power-up was a stroke of genius, a design decision the team arrived at when they simply couldn't figure out how to effectively animate Samus crawling (the technical limitations of the NES hardware were what made so many of these 8-bit games so great). Samus's screw attack, a special ability that allowed her to somersault right through enemies like an energized saw blade, remains famous as one of the greatest power-ups in the history of gaming.

The game's password system (the cartridge version's replacement for the original Famicom Disk game's writable save feature) provided players with what basically amounted to a primitive hacking tool that opened up a unique dimension of experimentation and exploration rarely found in console games. *Metroid*'s non-linear gameplay, set in an exotic and hostile ecosystem where the player is the alien exploring a vast subterranean landscape of labyrinthine caverns and ancient ruins of a forgotten alien civilization, creates a fantastic gaming experience that crafts a wonderfully unique experiential narrative that somehow always feels personal. Even the soundtrack is perfectly attuned to the game's atmosphere and ambiance. There is something almost romantic about it all, in a classic pulp sci-fi sort of way.

I have no idea how much of my life I've spent navigating that hostile planet's dark interior, desperately searching every nook and cranny for hidden power-ups and secret passages. *Metroid* remains one of the gold standards for how to do hidden secrets in game worlds, and it succeeds so well at teaching players to explore and experiment (rather than just holding their hand and spelling everything out for them all the time), and to view roadblocks as signs that they're on the right path. Even the game's protagonist, Samus Aran, represented a veritable ace up the sleeve as the game's ultimate secret, her true identity only being revealed if the player finished the game within a certain time limit. Nowadays *Metroid*'s design philosophies are central tenets of the genre it helped create, taking 2D platform games to a whole new level of depth and challenge well beyond mere running and jumping.

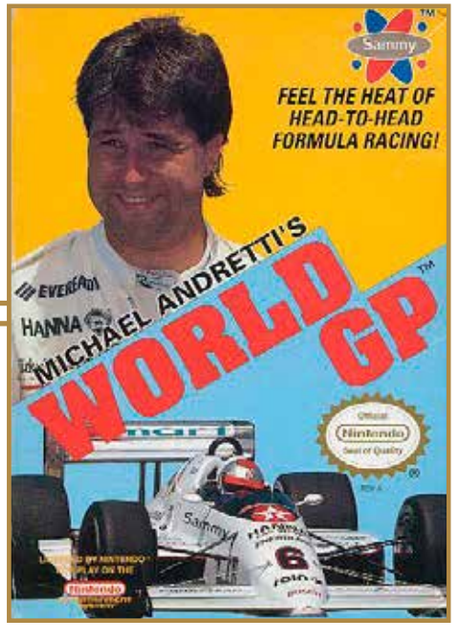
I don't know how many times I've defeated that mechanical life vein known as the Mother Brain, but I can draw out the entirety of the game's immense map from memory. I still do a play-through of the game at least once a year, even three full decades since the first time I played it. And yet, despite the game's technical shortcomings (pervasive slowdown in enemy-crowded areas and quite a few exploitable glitches), and even though I've thoroughly relished and enjoyed all of the games in the *Metroid* series over the years, the original NES game still stands out to me as more of a pure, focused experience whose simple narrative perfectly complements its wonderfully organic game design. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

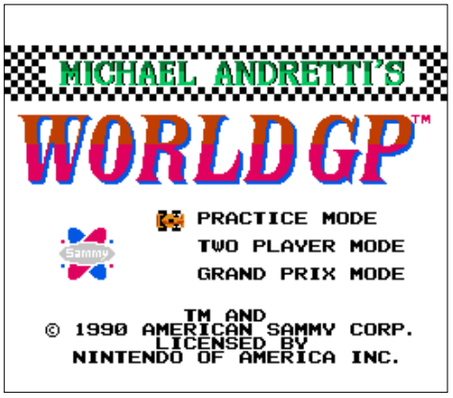
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Michael Andretti's World GP

PUBLISHER: American Sammy.
DEVELOPER: Human Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Formula-1/Indy Racing; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.





A deep racer with a lot of features for an 8-bit title, *Michael Andretti's World GP* lets you select from four different four-speed cars—Chevy Lola, Honda V10, Ferrari V12, or Mugen V8—for racing on 16 twisting, turning tracks in Brazil, San Marino, Monaco, Mexico, Canada, United States, France, England, West Germany, Hungary, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Japan, and Australia. You view the action from behind the vehicle. The top half of the screen shows a map of the track while the bottom half depicts the playfield and instrument panel for your car. Three out of the four cars require manual shifting. Andretti himself is on hand to offer advice (which is actually useful) prior to each race, and gamers can select from three modes of play: Practice, Two Player (split screen), and Grand Prix, where you race against nine other drivers with different personalities and racing styles, including Andretti himself. Tires will wear out, making pit stops necessary, but despite the simulation nature of the game fuel is not a factor.

Notable Quotable:

"I'm not sure what right a hardcore F1 simulator has in being on a system like the NES. Racing simulators are designed to intrigue the 10% who are enamored with stats, specs, and precise turning mechanics and infuriate the 90% of us who don't care about the accuracy of a virtual car's speedometer . . . I was playing in Practice Mode on the Brazil course, which happens to be Course 1. Course 1, I thought. This will ease me into the gameplay . . . At first it seemed like a smooth ride . . . At one point I misjudged a turn and spun out off the course onto the grass . . . or gravel . . . I spun out off the course . . . Despite the fact that I was turning the car towards the course and accelerating, it took about fifteen seconds to get my car back on the course. In a timed race that's unacceptable . . . it felt cheap . . . when you're actually able to keep your car under control (it's way too easy to slip) *World GP* settles into a nice, albeit brief, meditative groove. But if you're like me, you'll veer off course again and the trance will be broken. The devoted few might want to settle in and learn how to overcome the world and its Grand Prix, Michael Andretti style, but I'd rather play *Excitebike*." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

© SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Mickey Mousecapade

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1988.

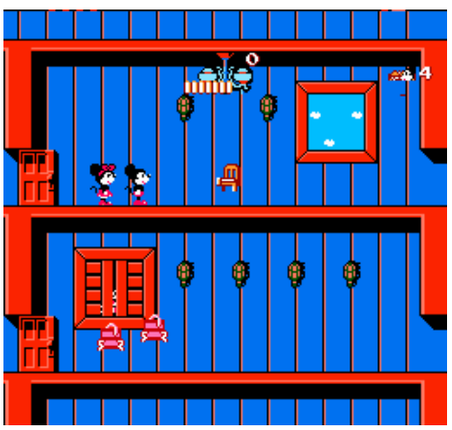
Mickey Mousecapade was the first Disney-themed game for the NES. You guide Mickey Mouse through five levels of play—Fun House, Ocean, Woods, Pirate Ship, and Castle—with Minnie tagging along, echoing Mickey's moves. Mickey throws stars at his foes, including crocodiles, scorpions, snakes, spiders, and jellyfish, and he jumps over obstacles and climbs ladders. He can shoot at lamps to receive diamonds, which destroy all on-screen enemies, and cake, which renews his strength. Minnie, who you cannot leave behind, must occasionally be rescued (by finding a hidden key) after being kidnapped by the Crow, making her something of a nuisance. She also gets stuck behind platforms and falls into pits. Peg Leg Pete, Crocodile, and The Wizard are on hand to make Mickey's task a challenge, as are walking broomsticks and playing card guards. I certainly like Mickey Mouse (who doesn't?), and there are some great Disney titles for various consoles, but I've never really cared for games where you have a shadow character tagging along. It encumbers rather than enhances the experience. Sorry, Minnie.

Notable Quotable:

"Although 'licensed software' is a term that causes the blood of today's game reviewers to run cold, in the late 1980s Disney and Capcom formed a union that inexplicably resulted in a steady series of excellent titles for the NES based on Disney trademarks . . . has a different, more primitive feel than the great Disney platformers that succeeded it . . . Navigating your way through the colorful set pieces proves a bit more harrowing than the colorful kiddie graphics let on." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Mickey Mousecapade* #86 in a list of 100 best NES games

Notable Quotable:

"Having Minnie is both interesting and frustrating. There is a slight delay when she follows your movements that can be exploited. There are numerous boss battles where you can position her to deal all the damage while you are safe below . . . But that same delay is the cause of much frustration. You can't leave the screen without her directly behind you. In any level that features some manner of platforming it can be annoying . . . Secrets abound in invisible spaces, although your curiosity may lead Minnie to being captured . . . Trying to navigate platforms with Minnie's wonky behavior is infuriating . . . I know *Mickey Mousecapade* has its fans, but I'm certainly not one of them." —Classic-Games.Net (www.classic-games.net)



Insider Insight: Back in the NES era, Capcom and Disney had a very special relationship, pumping out hit after hit of shockingly inspired licensed fare: *DuckTales*, *Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers*, *Darkwing Duck*, *TaleSpin*, etc. *Mickey Mousecapade* ain't invited to this praise party, though.

Sure, Steven Spielberg had to cut his teeth on tiny-budgeted "Movie of the Weeks" before directing *Jaws*. Beethoven probably wrote some real stinkers before "Ode to Joy" topped the charts. *Mickey Mousecapade* is simply that freshman who doesn't shower—a sloppy, strange game that stammers forward, level after level, wholly aware that it's kinda smelly.

Whereas we've become accustomed to imaginative NES worlds like the Mushroom Kingdom and Hyrule, here we traverse whimsical locations such as "The Ocean" or "The Woods." For real estate aficionados there's also "The Castle," featuring lots of generic castle-y features, like gray.

Surviving each of these painfully stereotypical vacation spots is made even more difficult by a well-meaning mechanic that sees Minnie Mouse shadowing Mickey's every move, except delayed by an excruciating second or two. It's an ill-programmed latency that results in many inconvenient demises for the female rodent . . . but WHO CARES!? Eventually, it becomes way too frustrating to bother.

This was the game that taught me a critical childhood lesson: Just because your favorite characters star in something, doesn't mean it's not total crap. Best to find some sucker at recess to trade with.

—Jon M. Gibson, Co-Owner/Co-Creative Director of iam8bit (iam8bit.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mickey's Adventure in Numberland

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Math/Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Big Bad Pete has stolen Numberland's magical number molds, prompting Sheriff Donald Duck to employ Mickey Mouse to retrieve them. As Mickey, players must run, jump, avoid obstacles (including falling crates, trap doors, bouncing flour sacks, and ringing telephones), enter doors, ride conveyor belts, and collect the correct numbers through five side-scrolling levels: City, Number Factory, Space Research Center, Number City Museum, and Big Bad Pete's Hideout. At the end of each level is a bonus round in which players must solve a simple math problem. Mickey is nicely animated and speaks the numbers and a variety of phrases in his patented, high-pitched voice. The follow-up to *Mickey's Safari in Letterland*, *Mickey's Adventure in Numberland* is designed to teach younger gamers number recognition (1–10), counting, and rudimentary addition. For some kids I suppose it's more fun than going to school.

Notable Quotable:

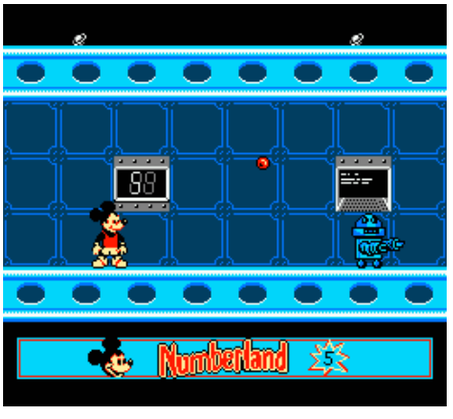
"If Hi Tech's goal was to make a topnotch game for preschoolers then they succeeded. If their goal was to teach kids a lot about numbers then they failed. You will be impressed by the graphics in this game no matter what your age is." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

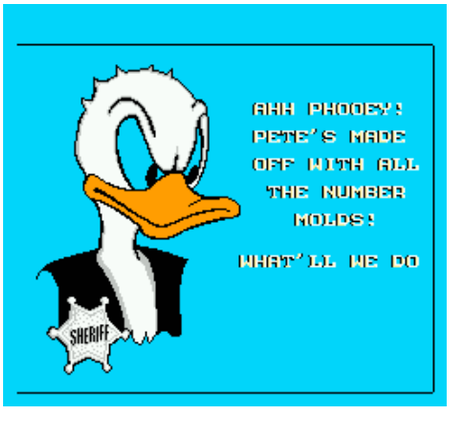
Notable Quotable:

"A well-made educational game under the guise of a platformer . . . There are three difficulty levels that affect the complexity of the stages, but only on the hardest level can Mickey actually lose a life by running into hazards. For the most part the game is structured so that there are only rewards, not penalties. The visuals are rather sparse in terms of detail, but they're still attractive and well-animated enough to please a younger audience. The music is pleasant if somewhat repetitive, but the real auditory highlight is the voice of Mickey himself, who clearly speaks the numbers as well as phrases like 'Oh boy, let's go!'" —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Though the educational elements are negligible, at least there are some good production values . . . It's a kick to hear a muffled version of Mickey's voice pronouncing the numbers or telling you that you've done a good job . . . The visuals are also quite good in places. The opening scene shows Pete making his escape with his booty, and it really is one of the best animations I've seen from the system. Mickey himself is also well-animated as he dashes about the stages, leaps up stairs, or plays with a ball when you leave him idle for a while . . . the environments are quite bland, with very little color variation. There's also a lot of flickering whenever much of anything appears on the screen, something that would be a problem if there were more enemies." —Jason Venter (www.honestgamers.com)

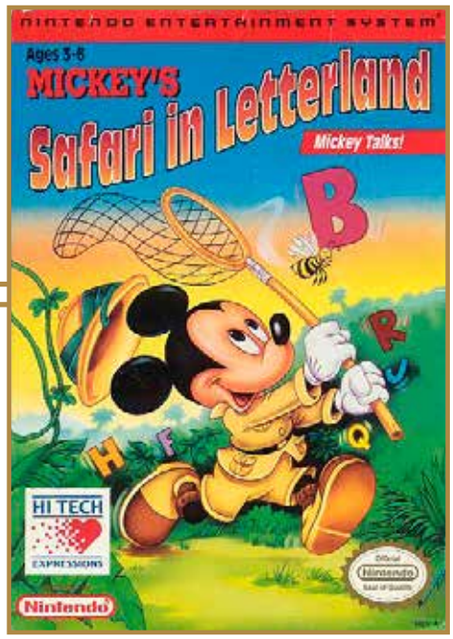




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mickey's Safari in Letterland

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Reading/Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.



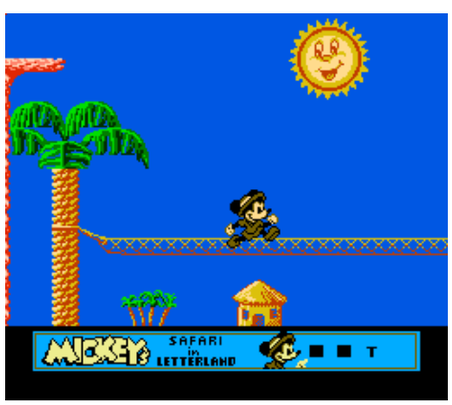
In *Mickey's Safari in Letterland*, Mickey Mouse must run, jump, and grab letters (with a butterfly net) through six levels of play: Yukon, Swamp, Forest, Pyramids, Jungle, and Caribbean, which are selectable from a map screen. The objective in each stage is to retrieve three letters, spelling a word in the process. There are enemies to dodge, such as baby seals, birds, monkeys, turtles, hippos (shades of *Fantasia*), snakes, porcupines, and alligators, but Mickey never loses a life, as he just bounces off the critters without damage. Mickey leaps over enemies, crawls under obstacles, jumps up to high platforms, and runs up hills—standard platforming stuff. As in *Mickey's Adventure in Numberland* there are three difficulty levels, all of them very easy. Mickey speaks letters and phrases clearly, and Mickey's pal Goofy is on hand to drive Mickey to each level. Cartoonlike graphics and simple bonus levels where you select a specific letter from the alphabet depicted on screen add to the edutainment fun.

Notable Quotable:

"If you are over the age of six there is no reason to play this game . . . Each time you re-enter a stage you start from a different point, but it still gets old pretty fast . . . the controls and graphics are great . . . for an NES game, the voices are very clear . . . I imagine when I have kids and introduce them to video games this will be a pretty good starting point." —Hoz's 8-bit NES Quest (hoz14nes.wordpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

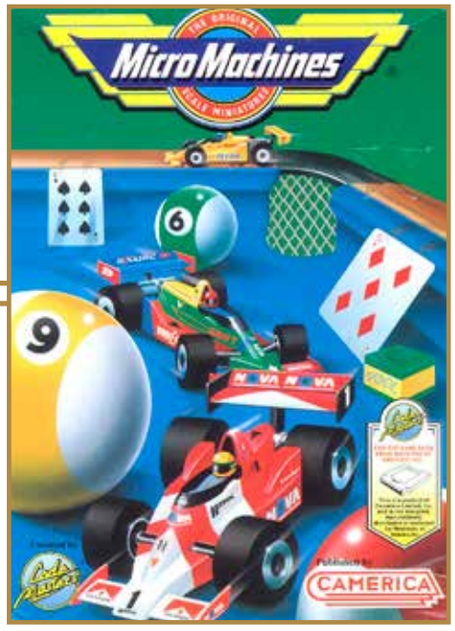
"Some poor unfortunate souls had parents who thought that the age-old justification for playing video games, 'improves hand eye coordination,' was not enough of a reason to let us sit in front of them all day. So these parents, with the help of some misguided game companies, foisted upon us a slew of 'edugames.' Some of these games were fantastic, like *Carmen Sandiego*. Some were not so awesome, like *Mario's Early Years: Fun with Numbers*. Some were somewhere in between; that's where *Mickey's Safari in Letterland falls*." —Avane: Vintage Toys, Games, Anime, and Collectibles (avaneanime.blogspot.com)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Micro Machines

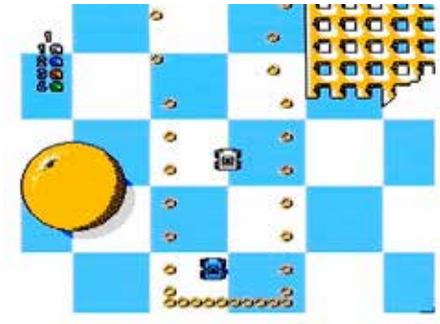
PUBLISHER: Camerica.
DEVELOPER: Codemasters.
GAME TYPE: Miniature/Radio Control Racing; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



Based on the line of toys produced by Galoob, *Micro Machines* is a nicely detailed, wildly inventive game that lets players select from nine miniaturized vehicles, including sports cars, a helicopter, a power boat, and a combat tank. There are nine different racing environments, including a kitchen, a pool table, a sandpit, and a bathtub. There are 32 tracks in all viewed from an overhead perspective. One-player races are against three computer-controlled cars, and there are 11 characters to compete against, each with his or her own skill level. The controls are simple, the racing action is fun and variety-filled, and the game makes creative use of rubber ducks, Cheerios, sand castles, and other commonplace items. Includes Tournament mode. A compact cartridge version of the game for use with the Aladdin Deck Enhancer was also produced. This game gets a lot of buzz, but it's unlicensed and less common than many similarly beloved titles.

Notable Quotable:
"Vehicles are wonderfully fast and responsive. They handle realistically, letting you skid around the corners . . . the best racing game I've ever played on the NES. It looks wonderful, and there's lots of variety in both the gameplay and the graphics." —*Total! Special* (1993 Annual)

Notable Quotable:
"Learning the controls for each Micro Machine takes time, but once you get them down they're razor sharp. Each mini-vehicle has its own feel. For example, the Formula One racers stick to sharp corners like magnets, whereas the tanks are slow and clumsy . . . a no-frills, straightforward racing game. You don't waste time choosing from a zillion different types of engines or tires. Instead you get down to earth racing fun!" —*GamePro* (December 1991)



Insider Insight: If you grew up in the UK in the '80s, chances are you had an 8-bit home micro-computer. And if you did, it's likely you owned games by Codemasters. Founded by the Darling brothers, who previously worked for budget game rivals Mastertronic, Codemasters was a revelation. Not only did the company offer a host of original titles for less than three English pounds, but their games were usually very good. In fact, Codemasters' titles had become so popular that they were regularly topping the charts above big-budget full-price releases that cost more than three times the price. So when my friend Martin told me that Codemasters started making games for the NES, I was excited.

I figured their first game would be *Dizzy*, but they actually went back to their roots with a top-down racing game. However, unlike *BMX Simulator* (their first game), this was a recreation of one of my younger brother's favorite toys—Micro Machines! Martin bought the game the moment it came out and I was eager to play it with him. In true Codemasters style, they put their stamp on the game with tremendous attention to detail. You didn't just race the little cars around a track; these tracks were created from different parts of your house, such as the breakfast table and the desk where you did your homework. It's easy to see why the game became a big hit, inspired numerous sequels, and was even brought back by the company very recently. There were few multi-player games on the NES as fun as *Micro Machines*. —Kieren Hawken, an Englishman who has been writing about video games for 15 years

QUARTERFLUBLISHING

Mig 29 Soviet Fighter

PUBLISHER: Camerica.
DEVELOPER: Codemasters.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Shooter/Vertical Scrolling Shooter; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1992.

Initially released for home computers in 1989, *Mig 29 Soviet Fighter* does a good job alternating between two distinct types of airborne shooting: behind-the-plane/third person and overhead view/vertical scrolling. The Mig player's control begins with one weapon, but completing missions (there are six in all) adds double missiles, spiral missiles, cluster spread (triple firing), and optimum (a combination of the other three weapons). Enemies to avoid or blow out of the sky include bombers, fighter planes, guided missiles, and more, including large airplane bosses. There are ground-based targets as well, such as tanks, artillery shells, and rocket launchers. Refueling and landing sequences add to the challenge. The action takes place over forests, oceans, deserts, arctic landscapes, and a chemical factory. In two-player Share mode gamers pick up where the other player left off, which is different than most alternating games, in which players each have their own separate level progression. The ultimate objective is to hunt down and destroy a stolen Soviet bomber.

Notable Quotable:

"If you're looking for an airborne shoot-'em-up that combines action and strategy, make sure you give *Mig-29* a try." —*N-Force* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Take away the background wallpaper and fluff from this title and what you're essentially left with is a basic first-person shooter with adequate graphics and sounds . . . Very limited in scope and playing options . . . There are a few cool features, but the game is repetitious and creates little excitement. The graphics are typical 8-bit, as are the sounds." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Codemasters shows off their programming prowess yet again in this spectacular Communist on-rails shooter . . . it sure is fun shooting down those who threaten Lenin's handiwork. Planes come in torrents and spit hot fire . . . In the middle of each level you ascend above the clouds and are given thirty seconds to attach to the fuel carrier. These portions are surprisingly tranquil and a nice respite from the Cold War hijinks . . . At six missions the game's a wee bit short, but it's nonstop action the entire time." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Might & Magic: Secret of the Inner Sanctum

PUBLISHER: American Sammy.
DEVELOPER: G. Amusements.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Role-Playing Game; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

A long, involved game, *Might & Magic: Secret of the Inner Sanctum* lets players pick a party of six adventurers for use in exploring the enchanted Land of Varn, which is a vast, nonlinear world of caverns, castles, forests, and islands. There are six character classes: knight, robber, sorcerer, cleric, paladin, and archer. Each character has six primary attributes: might, endurance, accuracy, personality, intelligence, and luck. To aid players in their search for the Inner Sanctum, which involves plenty of monster battling, there are more than 250 weapons and other items, plus 92 mystical spells. The bottom half of the screen displays the many text-based commands while the top half shows the creatures (which are nonanimated) and first-person rooms, hallways, and other areas. The NES game is a bit easier than the 1986 Apple II computer original, which was called *Might and Magic Book One: The Secret of the Inner Sanctum*.

Notable Quotable:

"*Might & Magic* provides hundreds of adventure hours without the hack-'n-slash burnout that's typical with extensive RPGs. There are so many different quests en route to defeating the game that the adventure never grows stale. This is high praise indeed for a role playing adventure." —*GamePro* (May 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Normally I love adventure/RPG games, especially long ones like *Might & Magic* on my computer. On the NES, this once brilliant quest loses the graphical and audio quality I expect on an extended adventure, but retains the simple controls and intelligent quest of a really good RPG. This is for RPG fans only." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1992)

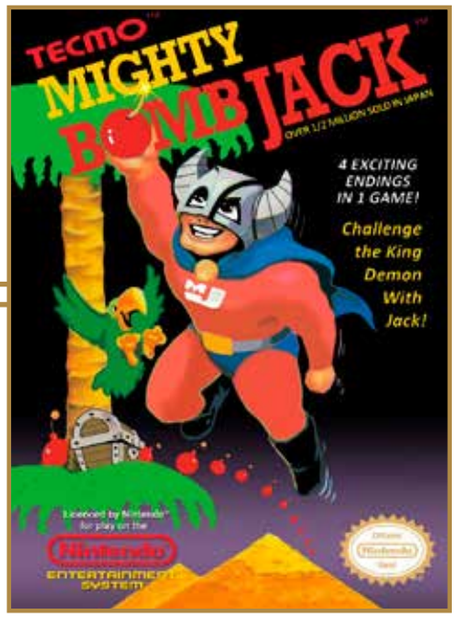
Notable Quotable:

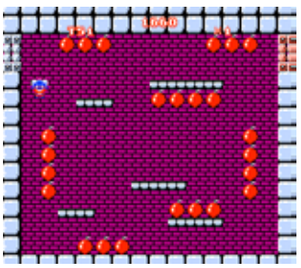
"American Sammy did an admirable job not only porting over the game, but improving on its computer counterpart in a lot of ways. Nevertheless, these touches don't cover up *Might & Magic*'s archaic dungeon crawling, tedious party micromanaging, and vague nonlinear progression . . . a large amount of quests to complete, magic spells to learn, and monsters to slay . . . While you can only have six people in your party at one time, you can amass quite the roster of paladins, clerks, mages, etc., each with their own set of skills and traits to build up . . . will test your mettle and you will grind for days (or what will feel like days) to level up your party . . . old school and antiquated." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

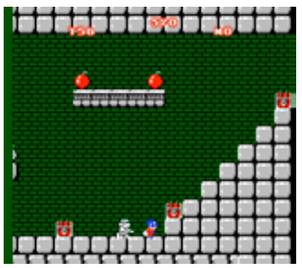
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mighty Bomb Jack

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.







Mighty Bomb Jack for the NES is a port of Tecmo's 1986 coin-op game, which was the sequel to Tehkan's *Bomb Jack* (arcade, 1984). The game is similar to *Bomb Jack*, but with side-scrolling action and "mighty powers" added to the already fun formula. Players guide Jack as he runs and jumps (extremely high when necessary) on platforms, collecting bombs and treasures (extra time, hidden doorways, gold coins, and the like) while avoiding zombies, birds, skulls, and other enemies. Sometimes enemies appear out of nowhere, right on top of you. Grabbing mighty coins (for mighty powers) lets Jack open special treasure chests and briefly transform enemies into collectible gold coins. In addition to the labyrinthine side-scrolling areas, players will frequently enter royal palace rooms that evoke the nonscrolling stages of *Bomb Jack*. Also, if Jack collects too many mighty coins he will be sent to the aptly named torture room, in which he must jump around avoiding enemies for a set amount of time. This latter feature is a little annoying, and some gamers will wish Jack could shoot or jump on enemies, but *Mighty Bomb Jack* is challenging and fun nevertheless.

Notable Quotable:

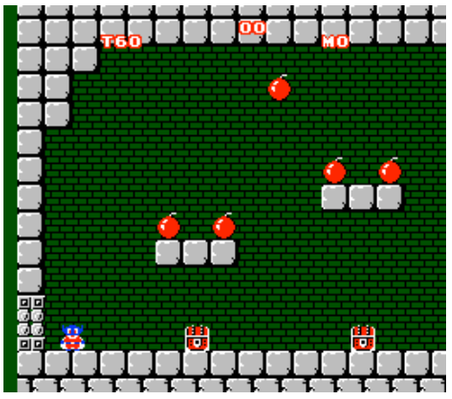
"I didn't even know if my little guy was supposed to be human or not. The game is a boring combination of walking and jumping." —Seanbaby (www.seanbaby.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Although the Japanese and American versions of the game look fairly identical, they show some important gameplay differences. Treasures are overall easier to find in the American version and special tiles/blocks can be removed in one jump, whereas the unforgiving Japanese would ask the player to jump down numerous times." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Jack's ability to jump and glide is impressive . . . the challenge wasn't actually reaching ledges or areas but more dodging enemies to get to the area . . . this was a blast from the past in the beginning and really took me back. However, the more I played the more I realized why this game never really held its place in my memory. It has some really catchy music and a cool protagonist able to leap to extraordinary heights, and it was actually nice playing a title again without thinking too much about what to do. Which of course adds to why it's kind of bland . . . That repetitive mechanic I felt got old pretty fast and pulled a lot away from the game." —Zain Moosa (sagamer.co.za)



Insider Insight: *Mighty Bomb Jack* was one of the more inscrutably challenging games on the NES. I played it plenty as a kid, often with my friend Damien, and while we managed to advance numerous levels, we never came close to beating the game, or really to ascertaining the game's objective. All we knew was that *Mighty Bomb Jack* provided incredible jumping experiences (jumping here being only slightly short of flying), contained countless hidden secret rooms and items, and revealed an annoyingly punishing sense of humor (collect too many of the abundant Mighty Coin power-ups and the game scolds you for being greedy and sends you to a "torture room" that's difficult to escape). But we had no clue how to ultimately win the game, nor did we understand how it computed your final score, which it mysteriously referred to as your Game Deviation Value.

Nonetheless, *Mighty Bomb Jack* was tons of fun, and I have many fond memories of playing it for hours back in the day. Eventually I did manage to beat it, but only through the narrowest of technicalities: a secret trick (that may have come from *Nintendo Power*) that lets you repeatedly advance from one bonus room to another, essentially skipping 98% of the gameplay on your way to the ending. As for beating the game the traditional way? Even today it remains unconquered territory. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mighty Final Fight

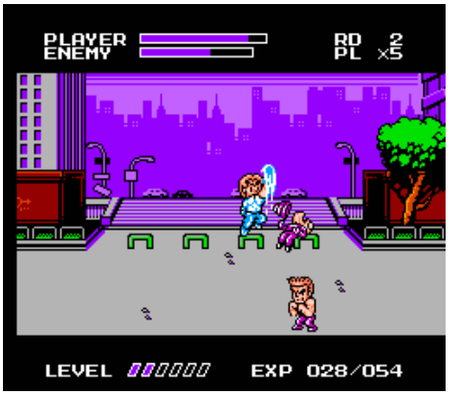
PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat; 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Released late in the life of the NES and hard to find today, *Mighty Final Fight* is a cartoonish take on the classic 1989 arcade beat-'em-up *Final Fight*. Players guide small, super-deformed versions of karate boxer Cody, ninjutsu expert Guy (who was missing from *Final Fight* for the SNES), or wrestler and champion streetfighter Mike Haggar through five levels of slums, factories, sewers, and city streets using drop kicks, knee bashes, head butts, pile drivers, super kicks, throws, and other moves to fight bad guys. These include bosses Thrasher, Katana, Abigail, and Katana's twin brother (also called Katana, oddly enough). Each character you control specializes in a particular weapon (you'll find weapons in steel drums), and each fights with his own style and has a special move. Cody is a skilled knife fighter and creates a tornado sweep; Haggar is the only one strong enough to pick up a mallet, and he executes a running clothesline. Guy throws shurikens with great accuracy and does a tornado kick. There is no two-player mode, but the game does add an experience points system that gives it some degree of depth, at least for a brawler.

Memories: During the early 2000s, when I was on one of my buying trips to various used bookstores, thrift shops, and the like, I popped into Movie Trading Company in South Fort Worth, as I typically had good luck at that location finding obscure Atari 2600 cartridges for a buck or two apiece and various Sega CD and Saturn games for $3.99 each. On this particular day they had a boxed copy of *Mighty Final Fight* in a glass showcase for $22.00. I was a fan of *Final Fight* and considered buying the game, even though it seemed a little pricey at the time. Unfortunately I passed on it, and today the game is worth hundreds of dollars complete. Ugh!

Notable Quotable:
"For a two-button fighting game on the 8-bit, *Mighty Final Fight* is one of the best for the NES!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"The stumpy, super-deformed character designs worked fairly well on the technically limited NES (despite some flicker), and the game actually played almost exactly like its older brother, despite the different proportions . . . the heroes actually converse with bosses before battle, often in a rather humorous manner . . . The soundtrack is all new, recalling something like *Mega Man* rather than other *Final Fight* games . . . While it's not the best beat-'em-up on the NES—that title goes to *River City Ransom*—it's still quite good." —Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



Insider Insight: During my time in university I was obsessed with beat-'em-ups. I played *River City Ransom* and the *Double Dragon*, *Final Fight*, and *Streets of Rage* games, yet I wanted more. While going through my friend John's stall on the university campus where he sold retro games I came across *Mighty Final Fight*, which I had never heard of before.

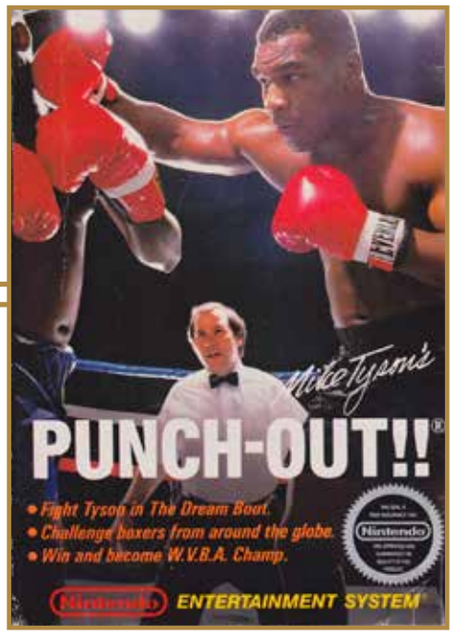
Here was a *Final Fight* game for the NES, but stylized after *River City Ransom*, having similar art and upgrade features and all three main characters from the original arcade *Final Fight*. It may have only been single player, but taking turns with my friends was a great experience. I never hear people talk about this game anymore, and aside from some buzz when it was re-released on the Wii U, the game seems to be an afterthought. That's a shame, because it is an utterly amazing entry that did something different in an established formula.

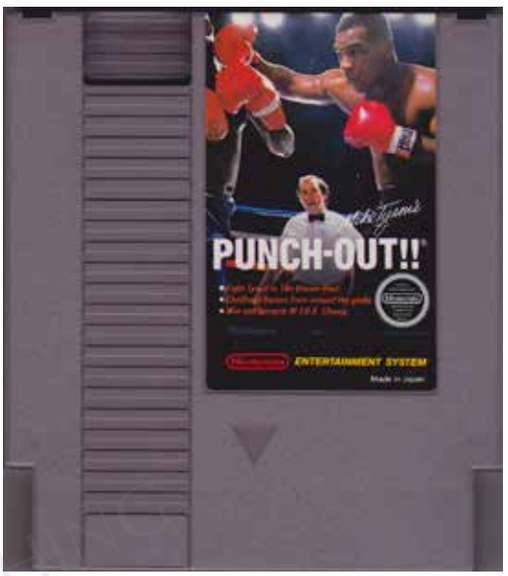
A complaint about the SNES sequels was that they didn't differentiate themselves enough, and yet a game that was a nice variation got ignored by many. Porting *Final Fight* to the NES would not have worked as a straight conversion and Capcom knew that. Taking an alternative route led them to create what is certainly one of the best hidden gems that can be found on the system. —Jon Balofsky, who has written for such outlets as Playeressence, Shigeru News, Real Otaku Gamer, and Indie Gamer Team

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D3.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Boxing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.





In the beloved *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* you fight as Little Mac, a 107-pound underdog from the Bronx who desires to be the World Video Boxing Association's champion. The 17-year-old must battle 10 colorful opponents before facing Mike Tyson himself, including Glass Joe (France's Glass Jaw), Von Kaiser (The German Steel Machine), King Hippo (Tropical Chief), and the amusingly named Soda Popinksi. It takes strategy and technique to win each fight, as opposed to simple button-mashing. Each boxer has an energy meter that decreases with every hit taken. When a boxer's energy meter is emptied, they hit the canvas. If a boxer is knocked down three times in one round, it's a technical knockout. Traditional knockouts are possible as well. Little Mac can block, duck, and dodge left and right, and he can hit boxers in the face and execute body blows. If he has a star, which is earned by catching the opponent off-guard, he can deliver a powerful uppercut. When Little Mac gets hit or has a punch blocked he loses a heart. When he runs out of hearts he gets week and cannot punch, so he must dodge punches to gain his strength back. Press A rapidly if he gets knocked down so he will get back up. The perspective is from behind Little Mac, but he is short, giving you a good view of the action. In Nintendo's 1984 arcade original, which was simply called *Punch-Out!!*, the player's boxer is a translucent green. The NES game was rereleased in 1990 (sans Mike Tyson licensing) as *Punch-Out!!*

Memories: During the planning stages of my first Schiffer book, *The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977–1987*, I thought long and hard about including *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* as one of the greatest games. After all, countless gamers have fond memories of it and reviews are largely positive. However, I never cared for it much, so I relegated it to the "Next 100: Honorable Mentions" section at the back of the book. Objectively I can see its merits, but I prefer more straightforward fighting games.

Notable Quotable:

"*Punch-Out!!* is not meant to be a serious boxing simulation; it's just a fun beat-'em-up that's enjoyable enough to keep you playing for quite some time." —*Advanced Computer Entertainment* (January 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphics and sound are good. Your boxer is simple to control (good animation) while the other boxers are detailed and smoothly animated. They are amusing to watch with their little dances and expressions . . . very playable . . . Will not disappoint you . . . a truly enjoyable piece of software." —*Computer and Video Games* (September 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"Because it shipped within a few days of Data East's *Ring King* the comparison was inevitable, and we found that this one did not measure up! Our main complaint is lack of movement around the ring. Little Mac is pretty static, as he can move from side to side, with a little forward and backward movement . . . The graphics are quite similar in the two games as both are caricatures rather than realistic . . . we felt this game was adequate, but nothing to run out and buy." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1987)

Insider Insight: My first recollection of playing *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* was at a friend's house, as I did not have my NES in fall 1987 when the game was released. I hadn't read much about it, but a boxing game seemed interesting to me, so I inserted the cart and gave it a shot without reading the manual. The first fight against Glass Joe is intended to give new players a warm-up and practice the control scheme of right-left uppercuts, right-left body blows, blocking, and dodging. You also learn that if you throw too many punches that get blocked you will get tired, and you must dodge your opponent's punches without the ability to counter until you recover. Embarrassingly enough I lost

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

to Glass Joe on my first attempt, and that's not a fact I would volunteer if I didn't have the Heavyweight Title belt to my name.

Every title bout against Tyson was a sweaty palm and intensely focused battle. You could defeat Tyson by decision with 5,000 or more points scored, and this was the method I employed when I first took him down. I no longer recall who was the first of my friends to beat Tyson, but it remains one of those gaming accomplishments I hang my hat on 30-plus years later. Since that first victorious bout I have been able to TKO him several times, but there is no guarantee when I fight him today that I will win. I played this game a lot as a rental before finally buying my used copy a couple years after its release. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

Insider Insight: NES games have a reputation of being incredibly difficult, sometimes bordering on impossible. Games like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Ninja Gaiden*, *Battletoads*, *Top Gun*, and *Ghosts 'N Goblins* were as punishing and infuriating as they were rewarding, IF you were one of the relatively few to somehow beat them.

Enter *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* Now, you know a game is hard when it has not one, but TWO exclamation points in its friggin' name! Even though *Punch-Out!!* is technically a boxing title, it's actually NOT a sports sim—it's a rhythm and memorization game. Of course it's not immediately obvious when taking on the easier boxers like Glass Joe and Von Kaiser, but in later rounds it becomes nearly impossible to progress without focusing on attack patterns, syncopation, and tells. For example, you need to throw a body shot at Bald Bull on his third bull charge hop, you need to block Great Tiger several times before he tires enough to set up for an uppercut, and Mike Tyson himself will blink before subsequently levelling you with a single punch!!

Speaking of characters, *Punch-Out!!* has one of the goofiest and politically incorrect rosters ever. You have Soda Popinski, the drunk Russian. There's Piston Honda, the Asian powerhouse. King Hippo, an obese Pacific Islander. And, my personal favorite, the mustachioed Great Tiger from Bombay, India, complete with turban. Not only are the characters eclectic, but they're also HUGE! Some of them stand more than ¾ the height of the screen. Driving home the intimidation factor was that your fighter, Little Mac, was . . . well . . . little. He stood at around ⅓ the height of his opponents, making him the consummate underdog. What makes *Punch-Out!!* so great are all the little things, such as the musical score that would crescendo and change tempo when a fighter hits the mat, Mario as the referee, the training run sequence through NYC, and the between-round corner advice offered by your trainer.

To call this game punishing would be an understatement. To this day I still have not beaten Mike Tyson. I've managed to make it all the way through the game and past Mr. Sandman, but I never beat the Dynamite Kid himself. At a recent video game convention I challenged any attendee to beat Mike Tyson. It was fun to witness the young, cocky kids try their hand at a game they had likely never even heard of, let alone played. Most of them bragged about how great they were at *Call of Duty* or *Fortnite* and how they would dominate this "old, simple game"—moments before being promptly decimated by one of Mike's nasty uppercuts. —Brian "CIVIC-MINDED" Lesyk, cohost of the Pass the Controller gaming show

Insider Insight: The NES sported scores of incredible games, but *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* is my all-time favorite. It was also one of the first Nintendo games I played. After pestering our parents for months my brothers and I finally received a NES sometime in 1987, and we started with three games: *Super Mario Bros.*, *Kid Icarus*, and *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* I was nine years old, and my brothers Kyle and Reid were seven and four, respectively.

Kyle played the game first, and I remember my initial thought, "Why are you letting that little guy beat up on you so much?" And only

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

then did I realize *he* was actually Little Mac, and that the larger boxer, Glass Joe, was the one getting knocked around! But while Glass Joe may have been a pushover, I didn't get far into the game at first, often reaching Piston Honda but unable to withstand his "TKO from Tokyo."

But at some point I finally cleared the Minor Circuit, moved quickly past Don Flamenco, and eventually KO'd King Hippo once a friend clued me onto his open-mouth punch susceptibility. From there I incrementally figured how to advance past each character (with the second Bald Bull and Mr. Sandman being the toughest) until finally coming to Kid Dynamite himself, the undefeated Mike Tyson. And boy was he tough. I can't remember how many times it took to actually beat him, but it felt like a zillion, and I finally achieved the feat around age 11 at my friend Jared's house. It was incredible and exhilarating, and at that point I'm not sure I knew anyone else who had accomplished it.

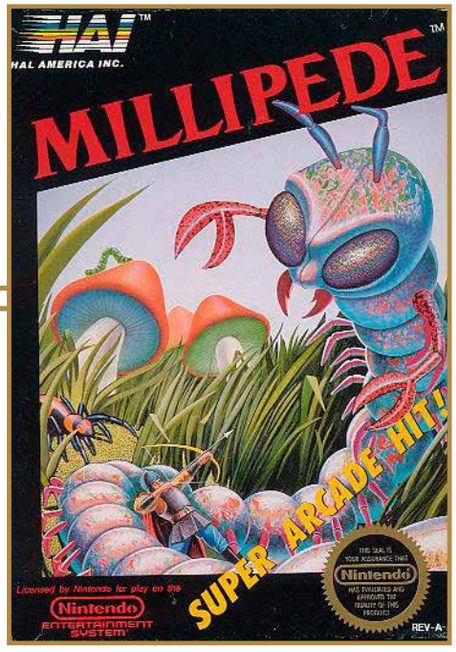
I gradually got good enough to beat Tyson regularly. The more I practiced the easier it got. When I was 18 and a freshman in college, I was at a frat party and noticed a group of guys playing an NES upstairs. The game in the system was *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* and they had advanced to Tyson. But despite fighting him over and over again courtesy of code 007-373-5963 they couldn't come close to beating him. Now at that point I hadn't played the NES in several years, ever since getting the Super Nintendo, and I had no clue if I'd even be halfway decent at it. Nevertheless, I asked if I could take a crack at the game and someone handed me the controller.

A wave of butterflies hit me the moment I pressed "start," but thankfully the rust quickly shook off and I knocked down Iron Mike probably five or six times before TKO-ing him in round three. These guys couldn't believe it. None of them had ever seen anyone beat Tyson and they gave me some of the heartiest congratulations I can recall receiving to that point. The thrill wore off quickly when I headed downstairs and realized I hadn't come close to actually meeting any girls at this party. But at least I hadn't lost my NES skills! —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

SCHAFER COLLECTION

Millipede

PUBLISHER: HAL America.
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory.
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Shooter; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1988.



The coin-op classic *Centipede* wasn't released for the NES, but its less-well-known (though still fairly popular) sequel, *Millipede*, was. When compared to the arcade original (Atari, 1982) *Millipede* adds title music to the formula (à la *Joust* for the NES), but takes away something even the Atari 2600 port managed to get right: the ability to start the game at the 15,000- or 30,000-point level. In addition, the visuals aren't as sharp (despite retaining the rippling screen effect), and firing arrows sounds annoyingly scratchy. Gameplay remains relatively (and enjoyably) intact, with gamers guiding a firing mechanism around the bottom quarter or so of the screen, shooting upward at segments of a giant millipede as it works its way, snakelike, down an enchanted mushroom forest. Other bugs to shoot include spiders, mosquitoes, dragonflies, mayflies, caterpillars, ladybugs, and "longicorns." Destroying mushrooms, which disappear incrementally when shot, alters the millipede's pathway, and shooting any of several DDT bombs stationed about the forest wipes out nearby enemies. The game suffers from the lack of trackball control (since that peripheral was never made for the NES) but the d-pad works okay. Also the playfield is small, thanks to a large green border.

Memories: When *Centipede* hit the arcades in 1981 I was all over it. I never developed any of the techniques of the masters of the game but I enjoyed it nevertheless, and it is my wife's all-time favorite game. I liked *Millipede* even more—it was super fun and satisfying exploding the DDT bombs at exactly the right moment to destroy multiple enemies, especially the millipede itself.

Notable Quotable:
"*Millipede* is as much fun as its predecessor, but the NES use of screen space detracted from the fun. I understand the difficulty of placing a rectangle inside a square, but there seems to be a lot of unused space in this version. There have been more successful ports of *Millipede* that really bring out the manic tension of the descending creature." —8-bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

Notable Quotable:
"This game is amazing. It's like '*Centipede* plus' with a bit of the ultra-awesome. The original arcade machine had a trackball and was obviously smoother than this NES version. It irritates me that the game is not played full-screen . . . but those are minor complaints because the gameplay is intact . . . this is a really nice version of *Millipede* . . . It's like *Centipede*, but even better because it's more frantic . . . perfect blend of risk vs. reward scoring . . . easy to pick up and play but difficult to master . . . If you've never played *Millipede*, you should." —Classic Game Room (YouTube)

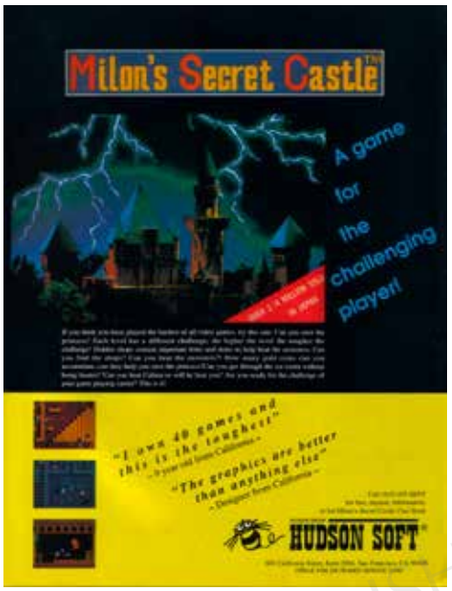
Insider Insight: When I started this hobby, one of the stories that grabbed my interest was the proposed deal for Atari to market the Nintendo Famicom in the west. Nintendo approached Atari in 1983, as they were still the market leaders in North America and Europe, despite the infamous North American Video Game Crash wiping out a big chunk of the industry. They proposed that they build the consoles and cartridges, with Atari simply adding their name recognition while taking a small cut of the profits and acting as a first-party publisher. In the end the deal came to nothing as Atari's then-owners Warner Bros. didn't like the stingy terms Nintendo were offering and wanted more control over the product. They also had GCC developing what would become the 7800 ProSystem behind the scenes and felt that their own console was a much better bet.

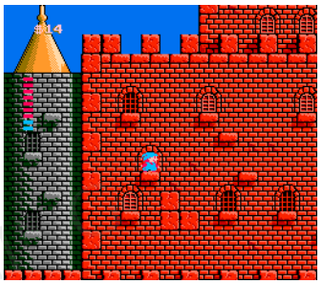
While negotiations took place Atari had their own programmers evaluating the console, which also involved programming several games. One of those titles was this conversion of the classic Atari arcade game *Millipede* (the other two were *Joust* and *Defender II*), which was eventually released by Hal America after the deal with Atari fell through. This fascinating piece of history led me to seek out *Millipede* as soon as I obtained an NES, especially since it's one of my favorite games of all time. It's a great conversion, audio aside, which may mean they didn't have a finalized version of the sound chip. There's a lot happening onscreen with little flicker and the action is as intense as ever. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for more than 15 years

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Milon's Secret Castle

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1988.





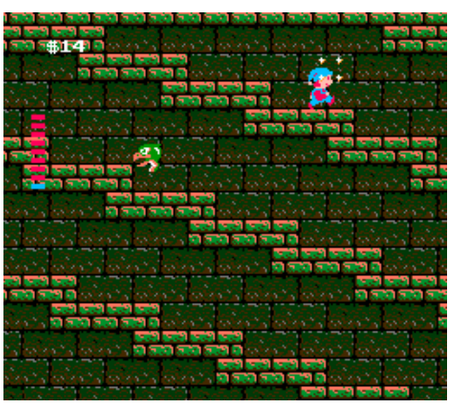
At first glance *Milon's Secret Castle* appears to be a *Super Mario Bros.* wannabe, but with mediocre graphics and a Little Nemo–like protagonist who shoots bubbles instead of jumps on enemies (bubbles are shot at a downward or upward angle, but not straight ahead). However, *Secret Castle* is more difficult (and more frustrating) than *Super Mario Bros.* thanks to respawning enemies, tough bosses, and hidden items that must be found to complete the quest. Finding hidden items requires lots of random shooting at bricks that all look alike, which is a tactic that now seems hopelessly dated. Items to search for include keys (for opening doors); protective shield bees; energy-rich honeycombs; coins (for purchasing items in shops); umbrellas (for rapid fire bubbles); and music boxes (for advancing to bonus stages). When the running, jumping Milon gets hit by an enemy he does *not* become invincible for a few seconds, adding to the difficulty. Thankfully there is a continue feature, which is achieved (only after the collection of the first crystal ball) by holding down the left arrow on the control pad while pushing start.

Notable Quotable:

"A little more information in the manual would have been nice . . . we really loved the game . . . One of those rare games that you like immediately and come to appreciate even more as you play. There's something irresistible about accidental discoveries that lead to secret doors and hidden keys—before you know it you've been playing for many hours!" —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"A prime example of a decent video game concept gone awry . . . had the potential to put a new spin on the platformer genre by setting all the action in a single location (the titular castle), in which you must uncover secrets to delve further into its chambers. Unfortunately Hudson went a wee bit too far with these secrets, which end up being so cryptic that getting through the castle no longer feels like a series of puzzles, but one big guessing game . . . controls well enough . . . almost has an RPG or Metroidvania type of appeal. This is greatly detracted, however, by how utterly cryptic the game is. Granted, the game is all about secrets, but we aren't simply talking about solving puzzles to unlock these secrets, but just randomly shooting bubbles at every last pixel on the screen and hoping you get lucky and find something." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)



Insider Insight: *Milon's Secret Castle* scared me, almost to the point of hysteria, twice. The first time I was about five or six years old, playing this 2D bubble-throwing platformer in our dimly lit basement. For a youngster in the '80s, venturing through an eerie castle with spooky monsters and large bosses was enough to frighten my young mind; playing in the basement alone and without windows didn't help.

Fast forward to the modern day; *Milon's Secret Castle* scares me for entirely different reasons. The brutally high difficulty, the unfair randomness of finding mandatory secrets, the constantly respawning enemies, and the total lack of invulnerability after taking damage—these things are enough to scare the pants off any player. The worst part is you only get one life! *Milon's Secret Castle* is a poster boy for the expression "NES hard." —Zachary Gasiorowski, Editor in Chief of myGamer.com; follow on Twitter @ZackGaz

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Miracle Piano Teaching System

PUBLISHER: The Software Toolworks.
DEVELOPER: The Software Toolworks.
GAME TYPE: Musical Instrument/ Band Simulator; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

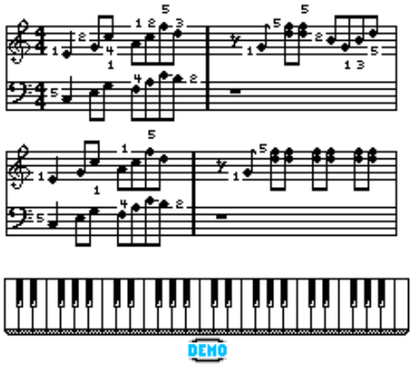
Miracle Piano Teaching System was the pack-in cartridge with a full-sized electronic piano keyboard, which is enhanced with two speakers for stereo sound. The game teaches users how to play the titular instrument. As budding Beethovens pound away at the pressure sensitive keys, onscreen keys flash to mimic the movements of the real keys. A variety of drills, musical numbers, and games (such as shooting ducks and making robots jump) enable players to practice music notation, fingering techniques, pedaling, and more. The keyboard emulates more than 100 virtual musical instruments and other sounds, including guitars, drums, and voice effects. In addition to the cartridge, the package, when complete, includes a foot pedal, keyboard power supply, headphones, and a MIDI controller cable to connect the keyboard to the NES console.

Notable Quotable:

"Through a series of software based lessons the *Miracle* will teach you the fundamentals of playing the piano. During a lesson *The Miracle System*'s software constantly monitors your progress, providing feedback and helping you hone your skills. The *Miracle System* even makes practice fun, with several different drills and game style exercises." —*Nintendo Power* (January 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Aside from the metronome clicks, all noises come from the keyboard itself, which allows for a much greater sound range than the NES could handle . . . The training tool does a great job of pacing while being clear and concise . . . doesn't push you too fast and encourages you to stop and practice what you've learned. I enjoyed how each lesson slowly builds up through increasing metronome speeds and quizzes before you reach the orchestra; here you get to play with the Miracle Symphony Orchestra, which is strangely exciting and a nice reward for all your hard work!" —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)



Insider Insight: In the early days of the video game industry I played every coin-op I could find and ogled every console, from the original Magnavox Odyssey to the Intellivision, until I finally landed my first home game system, the ColecoVision. I collected most of the releases for the console since the Great Video Game Crash of 1983 made the library accessible at a low price. Following the market crash, and without a home computer, home gaming became difficult, so my hobby retreated back to the arcade, where Sega was making a big splash.

Around this time I purchased my first set of wheels, a '75 Ford Grand Torino, just like Starsky & Hutch drove through the streets of Bay City in the famous TV show. That didn't leave a lot of money for gaming . . . and then I discovered girls!

Thus, with a dead gaming industry, combined with the newfound freedom of owning my own wheels, I briefly withdrew from the gaming scene with love and lust all a patter in my heart. Despite Nintendo reviving the home console industry with much hoopla, I completely missed the parade.

As time passed the car became less of a thrill and I began to realize that most women were less interested in me than I was in them. So I found my way back to home gaming when Sega released the Genesis, as I wanted to play *Altered Beast* sans quarters.

Fast forward to 2006, and I was trying to teach myself the piano (after failing dramatically twice) and was looking to acquire the *Miracle Piano Teaching System*. I met a gentleman who had the device but was not willing to sell it separately. He forced me to acquire his entire NES collection—almost 500 carts—in exchange for buying him a new PlayStation 3. It was a hefty trade at the time, but now I recognize it as the bargain that it was! So began my love for the NES. —Michael Thomasson, freelance writer, college professor of video game history, animation, and design

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mission Cobra

PUBLISHER: Bunch Games.
DEVELOPER: Sachen.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

Control a fast and powerful Cobra helicopter equipped with single-fire weaponry in *Mission Cobra*. As you fly through the not-so-friendly skies, blasting choppers, sonic jets, flying saucers, and other enemies into oblivion, you can earn power-ups that give your helicopter double, triple, four-way, or triple angled firing power, as well as circular fire and invincibility. If you are hit by enemy fire or by an enemy vessel you lose a fairly large chunk of energy. You also lose energy, albeit at a slower rate, just by flying. To replenish your energy levels you can pick up cells, reservoirs, and shields. At the end of each level you must face a mothership boss, such as a Chopper Carrier, an Eagle Destroyer, or a Double-Winged Fighter. The levels and enemies are simplistic and unimaginative. The backgrounds are flat and lacking in detail, most of the enemy ships move in predictable patterns (assuming straight lines qualify as patterns), and the environments (such as the islands and the sea) play almost no role in the action. Unlicensed and hard to find, *Mission Cobra* acts as a nice template for how not to make a video game. It is a vertical shooter in the tradition of *Tiger-Heli*, *Twin Cobra*, and *Xevious*, but it lacks the competent level design and good shooting action found in those three classics.

Notable Quotable:

"Although the enemy sprites change a bit from one level to the next, the structure of all stages in *Mission Cobra* is exactly the same: two initial enemy waves, a face-off with a pair of black patrolling choppers, another enemy wave, a section with fast scrolling, and then the boss. Enemy waves across stages behave the exact same way, such as the first foes retreating before touching the bottom of the screen (stay there and you'll be safe), the second type bouncing back from the bottom, and the final wave flying past you. It's kinda like having an upgraded Atari 2600 game on the NES, which is sort of charming for a couple of minutes. Unfortunately *Mission Cobra* becomes boring even faster than you'd normally expect, starting with the atrocious low-key humming that's supposed to serve as soundtrack . . . The major issue in *Mission Cobra* is that it throws so many fuel re-fill items that the challenge never really picks up." —1CC Log for Shmups (1cclog.blogspot.com)

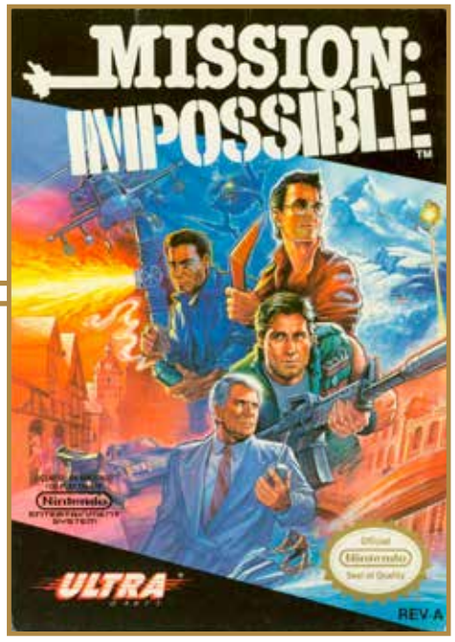
Notable Quotable:

"In judging video games context is everything. That may seem obvious, but it takes a weird spin when you consider knock off titles like *Mission Cobra*. If you enjoyed video games but had never played a cartridge on the NES before, and this was your first experience with the system, then this may seem pretty standard. This is a shooter, with colors at work, some scrolling, pattern-based enemies, boss fights, a scoring system, and other flourishes. You may even realize that it is a step above many Atari 2600 games and is identifiable as an 8-bit game. But if you have played a fair amount of other games in the NES library before this one you would recognize its deficiencies, of which the lack of a background and music are likely foremost. You may see the protagonist visual as being rather plain, the lack of on-screen scoring a bit odd, and some of the gameplay repetitive. And if you have played other shooters then you truly begin to realize the lost potential here, as you have to scrape the bottom of the barrel to find worse examples, though they do exist. Generic, watered-down, and tedious—yet, mechanically, a playable game, and smoother than some shooters out there. This is *Mission Cobra*." —Eric Bailey (nintendolegend.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mission: Impossible

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Action/Adventure; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



Based on the late 1980s TV show (as opposed to the original series, which aired from 1966 to 1973), *Mission: Impossible* has players controlling three IMF agents (you can switch between them at any time), each of whom is outfitted with different weapons and skills, such as guns, bombs, boomerangs, and/or sleeping gas. One character can even don disguises to make it past guards. The mission, for those who choose to accept it, is to rescue Dr. O and Shannon from the Sinister Seven. This involves traversing sewers, avoiding bomb-throwing enemies, disabling alarms, flipping switches to disarm traps and snares, dodging pitfalls, skiing down the Swiss Alps (using ski poles as weapons), killing machine gunners, battling robot warriors, opening gates (you must have the proper ID card), navigating the streets of Moscow, and much more. There are six mazelike, top-down stages in all. This is a long, involved game with lots of variety and respectable graphical detail, but it's very difficult.

Notable Quotable:

"Solid graphics . . . Caricatures closely match the TV show counterparts and cutscenes are well detailed . . . I also like the attempted remake of the show's intro . . . great music . . . as I got further into it I actually started to enjoy it more and more. It's definitely addictive." —Raymond Gallant (www.freakinawesomenetwork.net)

Notable Quotable:

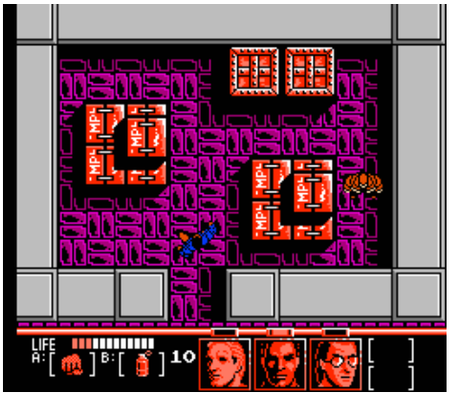
"Opens with one of the best intro sequences you're ever likely to see on the NES . . . a game like no other we've seen on the NES. It's sort of like a cross between *Gauntlet* and *Zelda* in parts, but other sections are almost like *Skate or Die* . . . a serious challenge: you'll hardly ever come up against the same kind of bad guy twice in a row, which means you really have to be on your toes all the time . . . loads of fun to play." —*Total!* (April 1992)

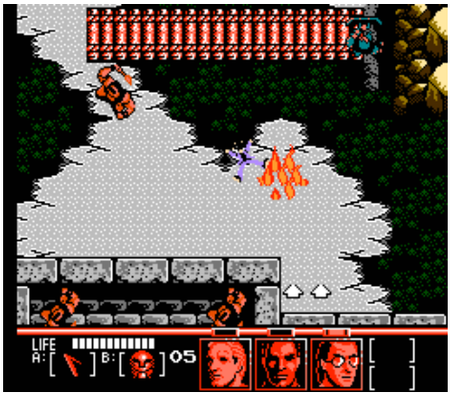
Notable Quotable:

"Reminded me of *Metal Gear*, but while *Metal Gear* was a bit naff, this is top-notch, even though it doesn't look like it from the rather drab graphics . . . there's tons going on. Once you start playing you really get engrossed in the action as you try to solve the many puzzles scattered throughout the game. If you're after an original and challenging game with loads of variety and plenty of different things to see and do check this out immediately. —*Mean Machines* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Sports the unconventional overhead view, which works reasonably well for navigating and dodging bullets. Characters are appropriately sized, and it's easy to tell who is a bad guy and which of the three characters you're currently controlling. Sound is pretty impressive, with a great rendition of the show's theme and nice background music. The effects are the standard fare, and you might even recognize a few recycled from other Ultra games. Control generally works, except when trying to line up moving enemies. The overhead view allows you to shoot in eight directions, but the response for which direction you are precisely intending to shoot is a little iffy. Other than that the game works well . . . a decent but unremarkable shooter that doesn't live up to the expectations of the license." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)





OSCILLATOR PUBLISHING

Monopoly

PUBLISHER: Parker Brothers.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Board Game; 1–8 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.

This virtual version of *Monopoly* does a nice job recreating the popular board game, letting up to eight players take turns rolling dice, moving a token around the board, earning money, drawing Community Chest and Chance Cards, and trying to bankrupt the other players by purchasing, renting, and selling houses, hotels, railroads, and other properties. The advantage of the video game lies in the computer handling all the accounting and money management tasks, giving the game a faster pace than its more tangible, more tactile counterpart. Animated tokens, a game editor (for giving players cash and properties before the game even begins), a timed mode, and a human looking hand rolling the dice add to the fun, as do the digitized voice effects.

Memories: When I was a kid in the '70s and early '80s, my brother and I would stay up all night playing the actual board game version of *Monopoly*. It's the kind of game where you can get way ahead, then sit helplessly as the other player comes storming back. For kids with no siblings it's nice that NES *Monopoly* offers a one-player mode, especially when friends aren't available to play the real deal.

Notable Quotable:

"All the rules are built in and the character animations are well done. I still like the board game better as I can 'feel' my cash and inspect my properties any time. Can't cheat or lose any pieces on the NES!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1991)

Notable Quotable:

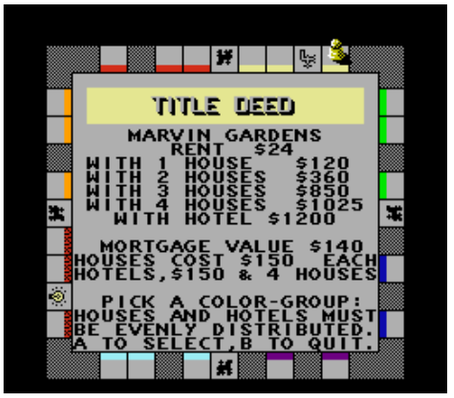
"If you like the board game you will ABSOLUTELY want this cart. The graphics are more than adequate for a board game translation, and the game is easy to handle and move around in. A nice upbeat soundtrack blends in nicely with the action to provide a very nice package." —*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"One thing I found with having seven computer players is that there is next to no chance anyone can get a complete set of properties simply by buying from the bank. This left me using the trading system as the only avenue to get those full sets . . . Graphically this game wasn't bad. I liked the little animations . . . There's an additional cash register and a US government building that will happily chomp away at your money . . . The whole scene of selecting a computer opponent was nicely done. Even the end game scenarios were pretty well done for a NES game . . . The music was a bit lacking in that it only had a handful of repetitive tracks . . . humorous voice samples." —Drew Wilson (www.freezenet.ca)

Notable Quotable:

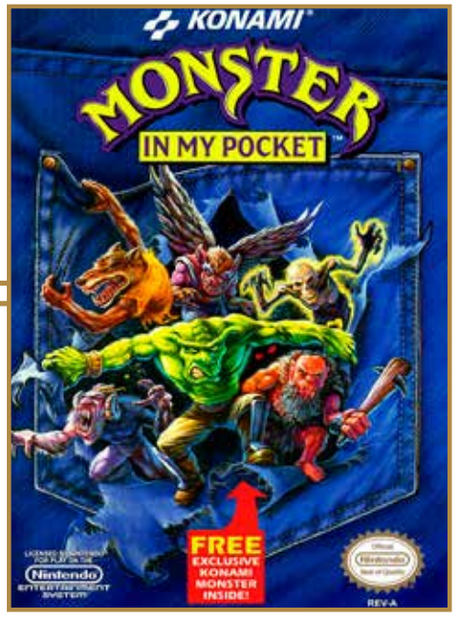
"*Monopoly* loses very little in the translation from board game to console game. All the properties and game pieces are here . . . Only one controller is needed . . . The computer-controlled characters range from dumb to feisty. Everything is automated, such as money and moving pieces, so human error is eliminated. However, some features are lost in the conversion. You can no longer make up your own rules in the game. The strict, official *Monopoly* rules are always in effect. That means no money on free parking and other house rules. There're also a couple of wacky rules, such as auctioning, that would have been nice to be able to turn off . . . The graphics are plain and simple, relying on basic colors. The sounds are annoying for the most part. Thankfully, though, you can turn them off. In all, *Monopoly* is a great port of the board game. Anybody looking for anything else will be severely disappointed." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Monster in My Pocket

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



Loosely based on the early '90s toy line produced by Matchbox, and on the accompanying cartoon, *Monster in My Pocket* will delight fans of the small, soft, squishy playthings. You guide a shrunken version of The Vampire or The Monster (i.e., the Frankenstein monster) through six nicely drawn, human-sized areas: Monsters in My House (Jack's room and downstairs), Big Trouble in the Kitchen, Crisis from Underground (sewer), Towering Catastrophe (construction site), Oriental Illusion (oriental palace), and Last Battle at Monster Mountain. The action scrolls vertically as well as horizontally. You'll face a nice assortment of familiar creatures, including Bigfoot, Ghost, Medusa, Cerberus, Cyclops, zombies, ghouls, ogres, and gremlins. The Vampire's attack is a short energy wave while the Monster punches enemies, but they feel essentially like the same move. Both protagonists can crouch, do double jumps, and pick up and throw various objects at the baddies, meaning they handle similarly as they climb stairs, run across rooftops and countertops, jump over fences and giant tacks, scale steel girders, ride a large hook, and dodge huge golf balls and eggs. No matter how far either monster falls the drop will not kill them, which is a nice change of pace from the typical side-scroller. Solid platforming action with a fast pace, nice graphics, good music, and two-player simultaneous action make *Monster in My Pocket* a winner. The game was originally packaged with an exclusive monster toy.

Notable Quotable:

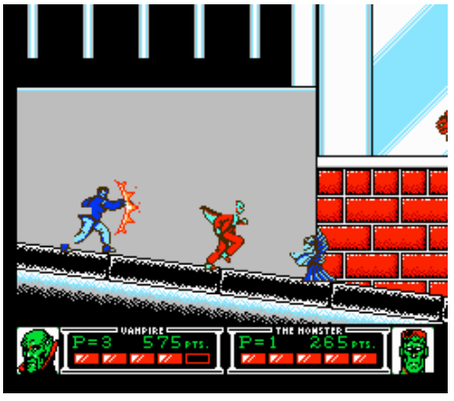
"*Monster in My Pocket* is more than just the NES companion to a popular toy product. Despite a fair amount of flicker when too many monsters do the mash at once the graphics are solid, including some nice animation of the Vampire and the Monster. Gameplay is fairly simple, but this cart is fun." —*GamePro* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Dumb name, great game. I really like the gameplay, and the graphics are excellent for an 8-bit game. There is lots of parallax scrolling and the boss characters take up the entire screen. The game is a bit too easy but is well-executed and fun all the way through. A great original title that could make a really cool SNES cart." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1992)

Notable Quotable:

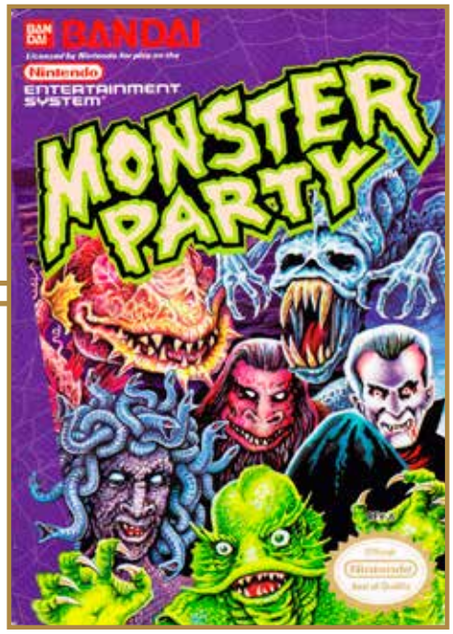
"A fairly standard platformer that throws in some interesting ideas to help it stand out from the crowd . . . has the kind of impressive graphics and music that we have come to expect from Konami . . . While it would have been nice if maybe the programming team had added some special skills that would be unique to each character you won't really be complaining, as the control on your monster is quite responsive . . . With such a wide array of monsters in the game, Konami was smart enough to make all the enemies and bosses behave completely differently, so you can't use the same strategy over and over. Some fly overhead and swoop down at you when they get close, some come at you slow, some charge at you, some use patterned jumping or projectile attacks, and some will appear and disappear at random . . . It's not the longest or toughest game out there, but there is some creativity to the level design and a lot of fun to be had." —Retro Junk (www.retrojunk.com)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Monster Party

PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: Human Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



Mark was just an average kid who loved baseball and hated school until one evening when he saw a blazing star plummet to Earth. A mysterious creature emerged and asked Mark to return with him to Dark World, where his baseball bat would be the perfect weapon for battling the evil monsters terrorizing the helpless population. Mark agreed, and he is sent through eight levels of monster mayhem, including a dungeon, a cave, castle ruins, a lake, a tower, and Dark World Heaven's Castle. Mark bashes flying demons, fish heads with legs, demon umbrellas, a haunted well, walking pairs of pants, and other strange enemies with his bat, along with batting projectiles back at the baddies. There are traditional enemies to battle as well, such as ghosts and spiders. Mark can also grab capsules to transform into a flying, photon laser-shooting monster. The objective in each level is to locate and enter multiple doorways to engage in one-on-one fights with such giant bosses as a man-eating plant (shoots lethal bubbles), Medusa (throws snakes), Guardian of the Giant Sphynx (shoots ectoplasm), Giant Samurai (attacks with a sword), and Punk Rocker (attacks with his guitar). When you defeat all the bosses in a level a key will appear to the next level. *Famous Monsters of Filmland* fans will love the game's classic creature box art. The Famicom version went unreleased, though a prototype was found featuring more blood and some different bosses.

Notable Quotable:
"Graphics and sounds . . . get the job done. The sprites are generally colorful, though their animation is somewhat lacking . . . each level has its own individual enemies and bosses . . . It really helps to give each level its own individual feel." —Mike Barbato (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:
"*Monster Party*'s unusual blend of horror and humor mesh nicely, leaving players with a quirky story and fun gameplay . . . most of the worlds were fun . . . When they weren't fun, though, they were horrid . . . the haunted house world is filled with tons of doors that transport you to even more doors. Not only does it take forever to find the right combination of doors to lead you to the end, but if you die during this time, which you will, you have to start all over from door one." —Defunct Games (www.defunctgames.com)

Notable Quotable:
"You might expect the typical cast of cartoon monsters to serve as your opposition, but the monsters you actually meet in this game are so much more interesting and creative . . . a wonderful playground of absurd boss concepts and kooky enemy design . . . the gameplay tied to them is unfortunately limited . . . The player spends most of their time as Mark, whose bat has too little range . . . The more interesting transformation into the capable monster Bert comes with flight and laser blasts, but it's set to a timer, meaning that the more enjoyable battle type is all too quick to disappear." — The Game Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

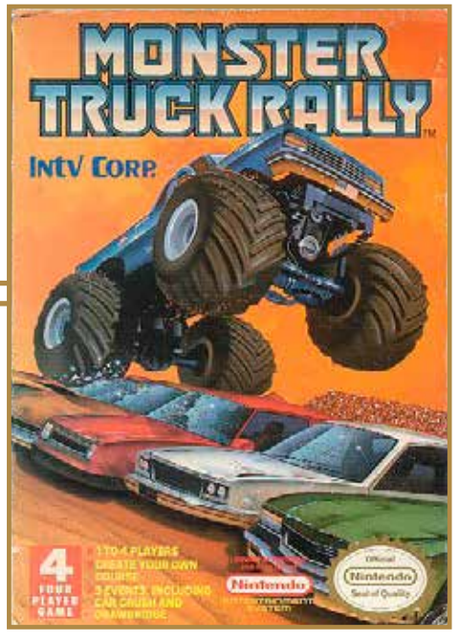
Insider Insight: *Monster Party* is a quirky little side scroller that allows you to play as either a baseball bat-wielding boy or a laser-shooting monster named Bert. Regardless of who you're using during gameplay, you'll be bombarded by some of the oddest enemies this side of *BurgerTime*. The colors, graphics, and backgrounds of this title are gaudy and gory, which lends it some charm. The bosses are unique, and they always have something interesting, but often nonsensical, to say before they begin to attack. I found myself recently playing through and finishing *Monster Party* thanks to the game's built-in password system.

I was always intrigued by the box art, with its replications of well-known classic monsters smack dab on the cover. Is that Audrey II from *Little Shop of Horrors* I see? As a horror movie fan this game was right up my alley. I never had a chance to play it as a child, but my luck would change when I found a copy at a northern Wisconsin flea market well into my fourth decade of life. Better late than never, right? I was not disappointed in the gameplay, despite the red herrings present on the cover, such as a Dracula-looking character that you never actually fight. Then again, I'd rather fight a giant fried shrimp than a boring old vampire any day. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Monster Truck Rally

PUBLISHER: INTV.
DEVELOPER: Realtime Associates.
GAME TYPE: Monster Truck Racing, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



Published by INTV, the company that kept the Intellivision going after the Great Video Game Crash of 1983, *Monster Truck Rally* is a hard-to-find game that lets you race in eight events: Hill Climb, Drag Race, Bog (water makes this a slower course), Car Crush (race quickly, but crush as many cars as you can), Tug-O-War (drag another truck over a finish line), Sled Pull, Drawbridge (the road rises and lowers, creating jumps and roadblocks), and Donuts (tight turns). You can also create your own tracks, race on a Combo Course that incorporates all the elements of the different tracks, and enter the Monster Truck Rally, which takes you through each of the events above. You can turn right and left, accelerate and shift gears, and brake and go in reverse while driving on dirt and mud, racing up and down small and steep hills. You can also drive over junked cars on the track to crush them. The ¾ perspective will remind players of the terrific *R.C. Pro-Am*.

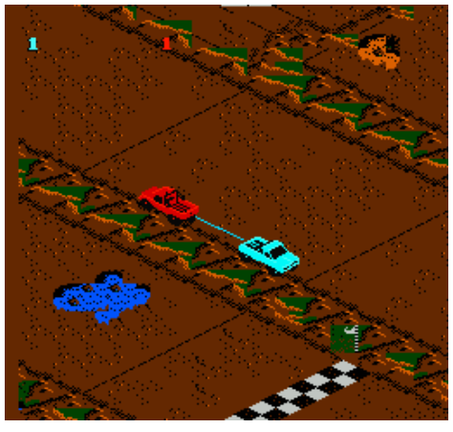
Notable Quotable:

"An absolute *mess* of a game. Your view of the track is often bewildering, the physics are ridiculous, and the control scheme makes absolutely no sense . . . all it delivers is confusion and frustration . . . Even crushing through rows of cars is lame—about as exciting as crawling through mud . . . awful control scheme . . . You'll catch some air over hills, but that often sends you crashing into invisible walls." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The trucks provided look like little more than slightly lifted Toyotas . . . they drive *so* slow. Even when you begin to get the hang of switching gears the computer is almost always leagues ahead of you, even in the lower difficulty settings. There are a variety of modes in case your mud lust can't be quenched, but many of them are perfunctory at best . . . Since the game's compatible with up to four players it might be nice to gather a few friends and see who can drive the slowest. I have a feeling it will be a close race." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Insider Insight: NES *Monster Truck Rally* was inspired by the 1983 Intellivision *Motocross* game and developed by the original Intellivision development team of Rick Koenig (programming and design), Connie Goldman (graphics), and me (audio). The same three teamed up for the similarly inspired 1985 Commodore 64 release *Racing Destruction Set* from Electronic Arts. *Monster Truck Rally* was commissioned by INTV Corporation as they struggled to make the transition from Intellivision to NES and other current consoles. INTV Corporation was financially failing before the game would be released and we were actually never paid for it. So, imagine my surprise when, a few years later, I saw it on retail shelves! We took them to court, but 80% of the money we recovered was used to pay for legal bills.

Rick Koenig has a real penchant for this kind of game. Even coding in assembly language on microprocessors he was able to model physics to make them feel believable. He once introduced a build where he could vary gravity, and in setting gravity to zero, driving around the track, on the first jump the truck took off and gracefully soared off screen. I laughed so hard! I still think to this day that truck is up there somewhere, still going! —David Warhol, veteran Intellivision game programmer and the founder of Realtime Associates

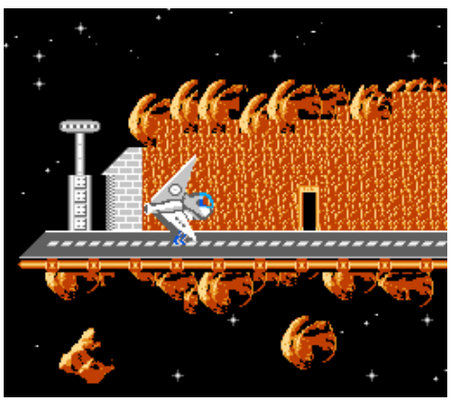
Moon Ranger

PUBLISHER: Bunch Games.
DEVELOPER: Odyssey Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter/Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

Unlicensed, rare, and housed in a pale blue cartridge, *Moon Ranger* is divided into horizontal shooting stages and platforming action, with you, as a space ranger, on a quest to retrieve pieces of a gamma bomb to destroy the enemy's Element Convertor. During the shooter stages you guide a ship through outer space, firing plasma bolts at such crudely drawn enemies as asteroids, frogs in bubbles, spinning aliens, claw-shaped cruisers, and pairs of eyes. You can shoot forward and to the rear. To increase the power of your weaponry you can analyze and adapt the aliens' equipment, which includes wave rider beams, plus shots (which travel in loops), lightning blasts, flam (which travel like boomerangs), and "it" (the most powerful alien weapon). In the platforming stages you'll don a space suit and clumsily walk along shooting enemies, jumping over spike pits and other obstacles, and entering and exiting doors to progress. The *Moon Patrol*-like sixth level (of eight) puts you in an all-terrain vehicle driving across the surface of the moon, jumping over obstacles and shooting at robots, space crabs, and bulb monsters. Levels in the game include Space Level #1, Asteroid Base #1, Space Level #2, Asteroid Base #2, Space Level #3, Lunar Surface, Moonbase, and Final Conflict, where you must destroy the Master Control Center. You can grab items for health and extra lives, and there are continues, but *Moon Ranger* is difficult to beat.

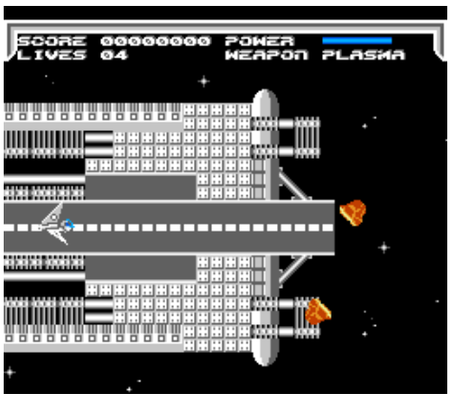
Notable Quotable:

"You have to wait for the bullet to cross the screen to shoot another bullet—I can't stand that . . . he looks like he's got a fish tank for a helmet . . . the enemies look like a bunch of reject sprites . . . you will not beat this game in one try . . . jumping in this game is horrific . . . Graphics on par with *Action 52* . . . controls are by far the worst I've ever played." —Action Jackson95 (YouTube)



Notable Quotable:

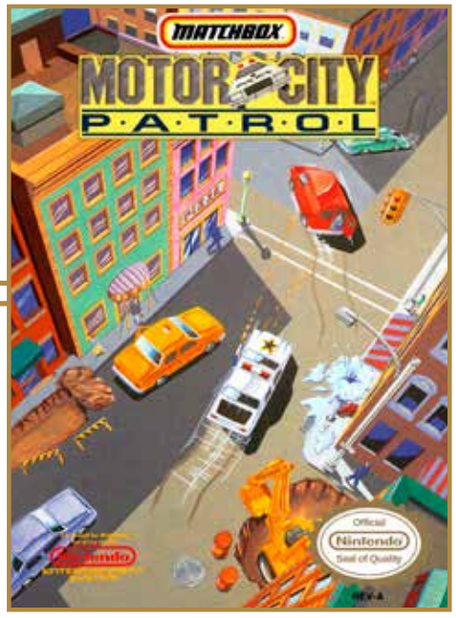
"*Moon Ranger* thrusts our titular hero into a shmup setting, a platformer setting, and towards the end of the game, a driving setting . . . None of these scenarios work thanks to the outrageously slow pace and groggy controls . . . There are weapon 'upgrades' but they fail to inflict more damage, rendering them all but useless. Once Moon Ranger lands on the ground and starts exploring you get a taste of his all-around dopiness. The space stations themselves are poorly designed and his body is huge and stiff, so when he jumps it can be easy to narrowly miss a platform and fall into a bed of spikes . . . consistent in its crappiness." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Motor City Patrol

PUBLISHER: Matchbox.
DEVELOPER: Source Resource & Development.
GAME TYPE: Mission-Based Racing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

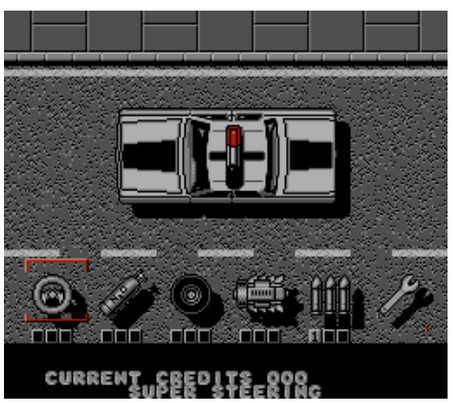


In *Motor City Patrol*, players take on the role of a cop driving around city streets (viewed from overhead) and patrolling five precincts: Financial District, Suburbs, Parks, Downtown MotorCity, and Waterfront, each of which wraps around to the left and right. Your mission is to arrest four types of people: citizens and speeders (by using the siren and giving chase) and robbers and public enemies (by shooting their tires or blocking their pathways). Vehicles to pursue include Matchbox versions of red vans and blue sports cars. At the end of each shift players can use merit points earned to purchase bullets, car repairs, or the following car upgrades: super steering, turbo acceleration, higher top speeds, and super brakes. If you make mistakes you will receive warnings that could get you kicked off the force. The map screen the game periodically switches to is courtesy of an "eye in the sky" police helicopter. At first glance this top-down, city-based driving game reminds me of the first two *Grand Theft Auto* games for the original PlayStation. However, there are simply not enough interesting things to do.

Notable Quotable:
"Offers solid control and some interesting city streets to drive down; monotony will eventually set in due to a lack of variation and any real challenge." —*Video Game Bible* (Trafford Publishing, 2002)

Notable Quotable:
"Has that arcade feel where it's all about the high score and lasting as long as you can before you get fired . . . boring . . . Once you complete all five precincts—that's 35 days of this crap—you start back over at the first one, with all your upgrades . . . the upgrades are pointless . . . The controls are okay, but as you upgrade speed and steering your car is all over the place, and more than likely you're going to wreck it just by trying to keep it on the street . . . no passwords, no extra lives, no continues . . . there's not much to look at . . . Buildings are gray, streets are gray . . . Even your police car lights are black and white . . . Music only awkwardly plays during menu screens and is abruptly cut off. All you have is the sound of your car . . . gets repetitive quickly." —Game Dave (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"*Motor City Patrol*, surprisingly enough, starts with promise. Its 'drive around a city completing tasks' gameplay makes it a spiritual forerunner to Rockstar Games' *Grand Theft Auto* series . . . once *Motor City Patrol* gets revving we see a game with a decent handle of what the NES allows. The graphics, as exemplified by the title logo in the header, are surprisingly rich. The controls are responsive and tight . . . Finishing 7 days in all 5 precincts would require over 3 hours of real time, all without saves or continues. *Motor City Patrol*'s endless repetition quickly becomes a lesser form of torture . . . plays more like a demo or proof of concept than an actual finished NES title. It seems like the devs came up with a novel (for the time) mechanic and then, instead of asking 'how can we push this to its limits?' they simply slapped Matchbox's name on it and called it a day." —Keith Good (www.keithisgood.com)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ms. Pac-Man (Namco)

PUBLISHER: Namco.
DEVELOPER: Now Production.
GAME TYPE: Maze; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1993.

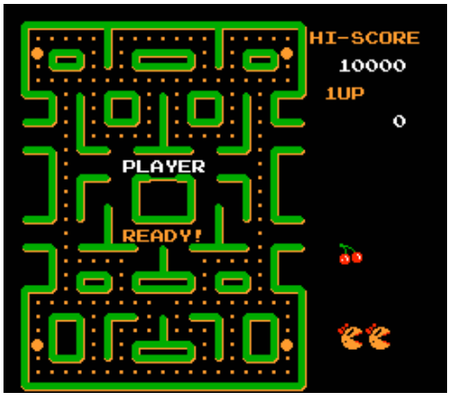
This is a straight-up take on Midway's oft-ported arcade classic from 1982, but there are some differences. The action is slower, the playfield is square (as opposed to vertical rectangular) to accommodate the shape of television screens, the coloring isn't quite as rich, the introductory animation is missing, and the little clapperboards are absent from the animated intermissions. The iconic gameplay remains roughly intact, with players guiding Ms. Pac-Man around four different mazes, gobbling up pellets while avoiding color-coded ghosts: Blinky, Pinky, Inky, and Sue (actually the ghosts in this version are unnamed). Eating bouncing fruit grants bonus points while gobbling Power Pellets lets Ms. Pac-Man temporarily turn the tables on the ghosts and go after them. In two-player mode the second gamer controls Pac-Man. Unlike the unlicensed Tengen version of *Ms. Pac-Man*, the Namco rendition does NOT include such tricked-up features as the Pac Booster, Strange mazes, vertical scrolling, or two-player simultaneous action.

Memories: I've always liked the *Ms. Pac-Man* coin-op game, which you still see in bars, restaurants, and retro arcades, better than its progenitor, *Pac-Man*. The enemies are smarter, there's more variety (four mazes as opposed to one), the bonus items move around the screen and, best of all, the action is faster. For the NES ports of both *Pac-Man* and *Ms. Pac-Man* I highly recommend the NES Advantage joystick for more arcade-like, more accurate control than the d-pad.

Notable Quotable:
"Far from a horrible version of *Ms. Pac-Man*, but it's just not that good, either. It's slow, it sounds terrible, and even on the hard setting the ghost movement patterns are all screwed up . . . feels like a giant half-assed attempt to cash in on the popularity of *Ms. Pac-Man* . . . Pass on this version of *Ms. Pac-Man* and pick up the Tengen version." —80s Comics (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"A barebones cartridge that gives you the game and nothing more. This single-minded package may have worked in 1988, but not in 1993. This was released two months after *Super Mario All-Stars* [for the Super Nintendo], a cart with four upgraded classics. Any one of those Mario games was deeper and more involved than *Ms. Pac-Man*, so it's a little hard to justify such a stingy NES game . . . a lot slower than other ports. The gameplay is responsive enough, but that feeling of frantically speeding through the mazes is gone. Thankfully the game remains challenging, even if some of the fun is missing." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

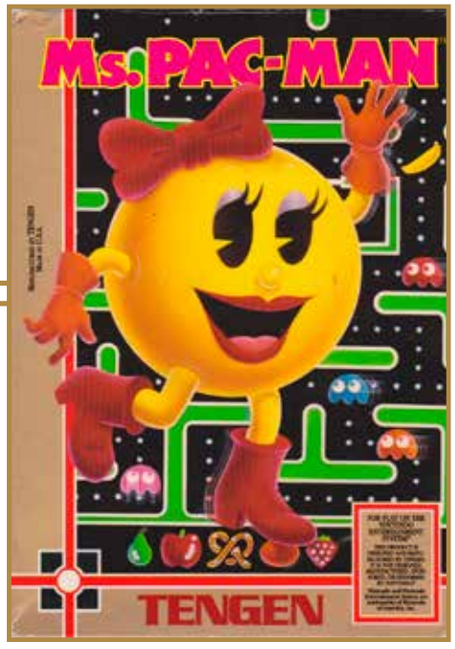
Notable Quotable:
"NES *Ms. Pac-Man* follows the same basic maze structures as the arcade and includes the cute little cinematics the original offered every two or three levels. Curiously, though, it does not follow the same color patterns of the first four levels . . . The NES version moves far slower than either the arcade or 2600, making it an utter chore to play . . . VCS *Ms. Pac-Man* was designed in 1983 for a console that was never designed to handle a game that sophisticated. In that respect Atari did a fantastic job. NES *Ms. Pac-Man*, meanwhile, underperforms considering it was designed ten years later on a far more powerful system. All told it comes off as an afterthought, almost like Namco figured no one cared about *Ms. Pac-Man* in 1993 anyway and decided not to put a lot of effort into it. There's simply no excuse for it not to emulate the arcade original's play better than it does . . . the Atari 2600 version is almost as fun as the arcade while NES *Ms. Pac-Man* is far less enjoyable than both." —Woodgrain Wonderland (woodgrainwonderland.com)

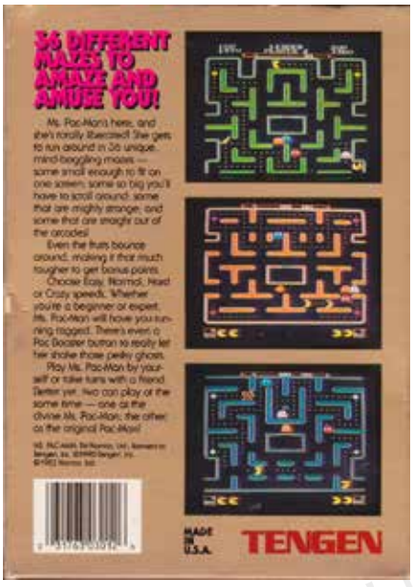


©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ms. Pac-Man (Tengen)

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Tengen.
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.





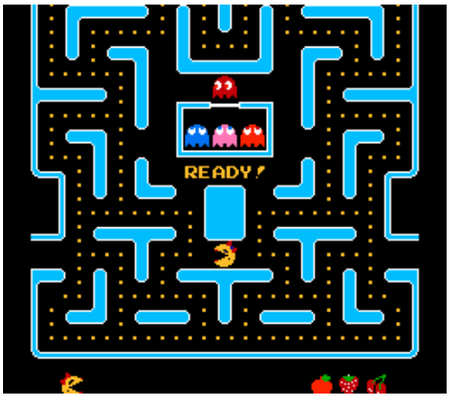
An updating of the 1982 arcade classic, *Ms. Pac-Man* brings Pac-Man's girlfriend in an unauthorized format to the NES. As the female version of the pie-shaped dot-muncher, your job is to clear a series of mazes while four ghosts are on your tail. To turn the tables on your enemies eat one of the four Energizer Dots you'll find in each maze. For a few seconds the ghosts turn blue and you can gobble them for extra points. Another way to score bonus points is to eat the bouncing fruit that shows up along the maze pathways from time to time. When you have eaten all of the regular dots on a particular maze it's on to the next maze. This version of *Ms. Pac-Man* includes a straightforward version of Midway's 1982 arcade classic, but it also offers a host of unconventional, yet welcome features, including the use of a Pac Booster, which makes Ms. Pac-Man and Pac-Man (the character player two controls in simultaneous mode) move faster and leave speed streaks in their wake. Other unorthodox options include a pair of two-player simultaneous modes (Cooperative and Competitive); four different difficulty levels (normal, easy, hard, and crazy); and a whopping 36 different mazes, including Big, Strange (unusual layouts and odd bonus items), Arcade (standard), and Mini (where you can see the entire maze at once). Unlicensed but awesome.

Notable Quotable:

"This is a very feature-packed rendition, but it does lack the option to simply play a scaled-down, proportional, fully viewable version of the arcade game . . . The Namco/Nintendo cartridge [is] not bad but kind of bland in comparison to Tengen's monster release . . . provides more fun . . . If you see Tengen's for a decent price, snap it up." —The NES Files (www.nesfiles.com)

Notable Quotable:

"If you were a fan of the arcade version of this game you should rush right out and buy a copy of Tengen's Nintendo adaptation. Not only is it just as good, the flexible package of options that were programmed in make it even better than the original! For two-player games I recommend either the alternating or cooperative modes. The latter does have some problems if one of you heads north while the other goes south, however (one of you won't be able to see his or her character). In competitive mode you'll spend more time making trouble for each other than in clearing the screens." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

M.U.L.E.

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Ozark Softscape.
GAME TYPE: Business Simulator/Turn-Based Strategy; 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

M.U.L.E., which stands for Multiple Use Labor Elements, is an outer space game of economics, exploration, and land development. M.U.L.E.s are robotic workers that you enlist to do your nation's farming, mining, and energy production. Prior to outfitting your M.U.L.E. you must choose a character to portray: Mechtron, Bonzoid, Flapper, Gollumer, Leggite, Packer, Spheroid, or Humanoid. Each character has slightly different characteristics (some are better farmers, others love the mountains, etc.), but they all begin the game with energy credits, food credits, and some cash. You can play *M.U.L.E.* in Beginner, Standard, or Tournament modes; in each game the winner is the player who gains the greatest net worth. To amass your fortune you will need to carefully manage your resources while buying land, producing crops, mining precious minerals, bidding on (or selling) food at auctions, makings trades, and buying goods. Also you can visit a pub to do a little gambling, and you can go Wampus hunting in the mountains to help you shore up your bank account. From time to time planet quakes, acid rain, and pest attacks will destroy some of your valuable commodities. Pirates are a problem as well. Based on the 1983 computer game.

©SCHILLER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

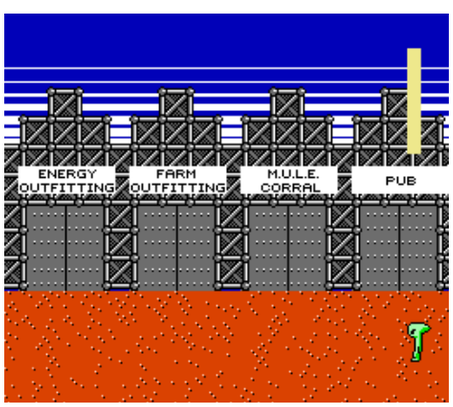
"Graphically it's more detailed than the Atari or Commodore version, but somewhat more bland. The sound chip of the NES, in this case, was detrimental to the theme song." — Racket Boy (www.racketboy.com)

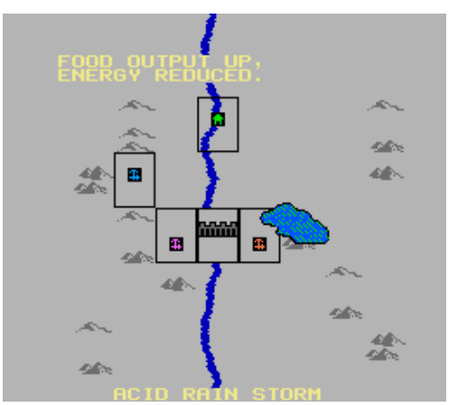
Notable Quotable:

"A ton of complexity . . . As a multi-player game that you can invite a few friends over to play I highly recommend *M.U.L.E.* There's nothing else really quite like it . . . I find the lack of sound fairly off-putting, but if you can get past that there's plenty good about *M.U.L.E.* on the NES." —Louis Gorenfeld (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"It was the moment I realized that video games could be a lot more ambitious than ninjas and pirates . . . Once you get the basics down *M.U.L.E.* becomes a tense game of strategy. And once you get done explaining how the game works with your friends it also becomes an incredible four-player experience . . . The graphics are bad to the point of being distracting . . . The visuals may not have held up, but the core gameplay is as strong as ever . . . a genuine classic . . . one of the few board game style products worth buying on your Nintendo Entertainment System." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)





Muppet Adventure: Chaos at the Carnival

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Mind's Eye Technology.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

The evil Dr. Grump has "pignapped" Miss Piggy, forcing the Muppets to conquer four diabolical carnival rides—four distinct gaming genres—in *Muppet Adventure: Chaos at the Carnival*. An *Asteroids*-type shooter, Lost in Space Ride employs rotate/thrust/fire controls. Instead of free roaming action the game scrolls to the right, with Gonzo flying a floaty ship while avoiding and shooting satellites, space dogs, asteroids and, in certain areas, cavern walls, which are an annoyingly tight squeeze. In Amazing Ice Cream Maze, Fozzie walks around simple mazes, throwing bones, banana peels, and hearts at carnival barkers. Viewed from overhead, Crash Car Course scrolls to the right with Animal driving a bumper car–like vehicle through an obstacle course, running over flags while avoiding hard-to-dodge booby traps, oil slicks, and rubber band bumpers. More obstacle avoidance—The Raging River Ride, which plays like *Toobin'*, has Kermit propelling his boat down a river, catching buoys and periscopes while avoiding rocks, logs, dead ends, and some irritating whirlpools. Beating all four rides takes players to a side-scrolling platforming stage where Kermit must tickle Grumpasaurus with a feather to rescue Piggy. While the cartridge does contain four distinct genres (plus a boss), each is little more than a long, tedious mini-game. Plus the package fails miserably to live up to the personality and humor of the Muppets franchise.

Memories: When I was a kid during the late '70s, I thought *The Muppets* was one of the funniest, most entertaining shows on television: a wonderful brew of puppetry, music, satire, slapstick, and famous guest stars. Unfortunately, the NES cart based on the program is little more than a prosaic, personality deprived collection of arcade rip-offs. The computer version of the game, released the year before, contains the following carnival attractions: Bumper Cars, Funhouse, Tunnel of Love, Duck Hunt, and Space Ride.

Notable Quotable:

"Stay away unless you are very bored or have a major thing for the Muppets. Just don't go thinking this would be a nice game for your five-year-old nephew. It will make him cry, guaranteed. If you're trying to collect all the games save this one for later." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The game's main difficulty arises from its rather clumsy controls. None of the characters really feels as responsive as he should . . . there'd been some moments that were slightly enjoyable, but overall, *Muppet Adventure: Chaos at the Carnival* feels more like a chore than anything . . . Fans of Jim Henson's creatures would do better to watch the movies. That's true not only for adults but also children. There may have been a time when this game was worth a play, but nowadays it's just a waste of space." —Jason Venter (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Feels pasted together . . . isn't exactly the prettiest thing to look at . . . Looking at gray asphalt for ten minutes while trying to wedge Animal through a pair of large bombs isn't exactly my idea of eye candy . . . the backgrounds are pretty ugly as a whole. The characters themselves can be identified as the Muppets they were intended to be, but they do clash somewhat with everything . . . On the plus side, the music is rather catchy . . . The sound effects also serve their purpose, but they are far from special . . . reeks of tedium and dismay. The controls are sort of a mixed bag . . . the mini-games are far too lengthy and require too much precision; where's the fun in constantly running into things and losing health?" —Random.access (randomacc.net)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

M.U.S.C.L.E.

PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Wrestling; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1986.

The acronym for "millions of unusual small creatures lurking everywhere," *M.U.S.C.L.E.* is loosely based on a Japanese comic book and cartoon called Kinnikuman, and on the resultant line of tiny, rubbery toys (which was released in the US by Mattel). Players select from eight different wrestlers: M.U.S.C.L.E. Man, Robin Mask, Ashra Man, Terry Man, Geronimo, Larmen Man, Buffalo Man, and Wars Man, each of whom can pull off a special move, along with the following standard moves: punch, kick, jump, back drop, push, dropkick, clothesline, and flying body attack. Special moves include muscle driver, tower bridge, Ashra buster, bulldogging headlock, tomahawk technique, fatal kung fu, and hurricane mixer. The elevated view of the ring is from the side and the screen scrolls a bit horizontally. With its blocky fighters, lack of detail, and washed out colors, *M.U.S.C.L.E.* looks primitive compared to other wrestling titles of the era, such as *Pro Wrestling* and *Ring King*, but fans of the franchise may want to check it out.

Notable Quotable:

"There are some nice special effects, and the characters *do* look like their doughy Mattel toy counterparts. Maybe that's the problem. It's not always easy to move your chubby proxy with precision, or to see whether they're doing what you want them to do! This detracts from the sweatin', gruntin' fun a bit. However, the booster moves (especially that of Riot) are a riot!" —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

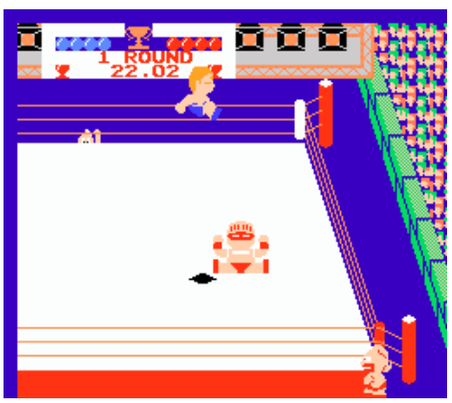
Notable Quotable:

"Features eight different characters who look as if they came straight out of a cartoon . . . Learning the strengths and weaknesses of each fighter (and choosing your tag team accordingly) can lead to advanced strategy techniques for experienced players. On the other hand, even very young players can enjoy this game because the control scheme is far less complicated than that of *Tag Team Wrestling* . . . a cute game that reveals its depth with repeated sessions." —*Computer Entertainer* (December 1986)

Notable Quotable:

"The controls are a bit clunky because your character pauses after each move . . . every time you attempt to strike your opponent you leave yourself wide open to a counterattack. Some might appreciate the strategy involved with a fighting system such as this, but I think it needlessly slows the pacing down and takes much of the excitement away . . . Playing with a friend is much, much better than playing against the computer . . . visuals are very basic overall . . . The rings themselves look decent enough, but like the wrestlers, are a bit on the simplistic side . . . The only music in the game is on the title screen and it is completely forgettable. The sound effects are as basic as you can get without stepping back a generation into Atari." —Josh Kramer (www.thunderboltgames.com)

Insider Insight: I grew up having amazing grandparents. Our time together was filled with a pure distillation of pop culture and the things they loved, and they passed that love on to me. My grandmother, a poor girl from Holland who came to America after World War II, wanted her grandson to have everything and know everything now that she was successful and could splurge. And she loved wrestling, so when we saw the trash can wrestlers at the store we got them. She enjoyed them as much as I did and would have little matches with me. And once we saw there was a video game based on these weird little wrestlers we knew we had to have it. It is not the greatest wrestling game of all time, but for us, a little kid and his wrestling loving grandma, there couldn't have been anything better. —Dan Ryan, cohost of the *Stone Age Gamer* podcast, writer of beer, wrestling, gaming, kung-fu, and other geeky articles for geekade.com



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Mutant Virus

PUBLISHER: American Softworks.
DEVELOPER: Rocket Science Games.
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Called back from his first vacation in more than two years, computer hot shot Ron Trainer is told by his boss at Computer Master Debuggers that he is needed for a desperate mission. It seems that the five most critical areas of the CPI (the computer that controls everything from databases to traffic signals) has been infected by a killer virus. Planes are crashing and many other disasters are taking place all over the world. As Trainer, you will don your JetSuit and be miniaturized so you can get inside the CPI and fight the virus one on one. The JetSuit is a Vaccine Blaster that has three types of charges: automatic, short fuse, and long fuse. You will spend most of your time flying around a series of top-down, single-screen rooms, shooting virus clusters while trying to avoid flying over virus-infected areas. In addition to viruses, the infected computer has bits of code (in the form of capsules) that act as power-ups. These include shields, super guns (bullets bounce off walls), and countermeasures (clusters of antibodies). The graphics in this game are plain but serviceable. The computer terminals look decent, but the grids, virus clusters, and the overall look of the game will never win any awards for visuals. The music and sound effects are appropriately futuristic and it's got some nice cutscenes. Gameplay is challenging, but ultimately unsatisfying. NES purists will find it dull and limiting, and fans of consoles and arcade games made previous to the NES will find it unexciting when compared to arcade classics with similar but superior gameplay, such as *Asteroids* (1979), *Space Dungeon* (1981), and *Robotron: 2084* (1982).

Memories: As I write this it's spring 2020 in the real world, and we are locked in the grips of a global pandemic caused by an infectious respiratory disease called COVID-19. Stores are closed, school is out, businesses are shut down, unemployment is skyrocketing, and people are scared. "Social distancing" is the order of the day as scientists, doctors, and others scramble to get a hold on this nasty virus and stop the spreading. As such I'll never look at *Mutant Virus* or anything else called "virus" the same way again.

Notable Quotable:

"After hearing horror stories on how hard this game is I was pleasantly surprised by how easy the first level was. It gave me a huge confidence boost. At the beginning of level two I was humbled almost instantly. The virus expanded much more quickly, and my gun seemed to do much less damage. It took dozens of attempts before I started making progress . . . I beat each level fair and square and felt the greatest sense of victory I have ever experienced playing an NES game." —HOZ's 8-Bit NES Quest (hoz14nes.wordpress.com)

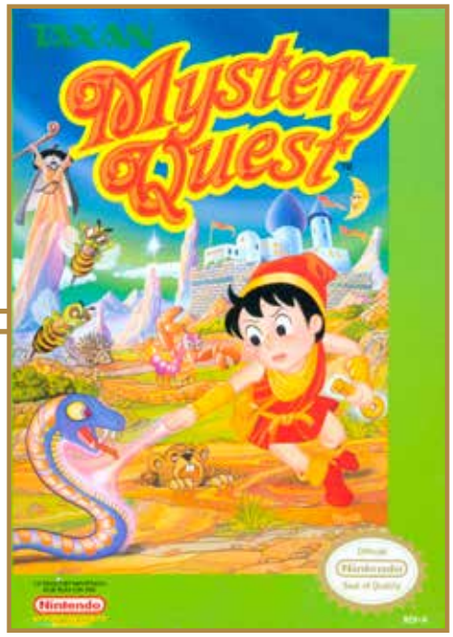
Notable Quotable:

"It's all very nice and orderly for the first stage—virus gets hit by stars, virus stops moving, onto next room, repeat pattern, wheeeeee!—but the second stage turns up the juice. The viruses begin to mutate and get stronger, and you need to get weapon upgrades to harm them at all. Shooting at weaker one-pronged strains supposedly infects the stronger multi-pronged ones, but I found myself getting overrun by the evil much too fast, even with the upgrades. *Mutant Virus* tries to be different, to mutate into something special that will infect the entire gaming community with rapture. Alas, too much of *Mutant Virus* will definitely make one sick, or at the very least, bitter and hostile." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Mystery Quest

PUBLISHER: Taxan.
DEVELOPER: Carry Lab.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



In *Mystery Quest* you, as a young boy named Hao, must locate four magic talismans—wealth, wisdom, happiness, and peace—by exploring in and around four mystery castles. You'll battle enemies and jump over water, nail-covered floors, and other obstacles. Each castle in this game, which features both standard platforming and exploratory areas filled with hidden secrets, is riddled with mazes, underground passages, and creatures including snakes, gophers, wasps, bats, and dragons. To battle the baddies, Hao can shoot magic in the form of round projectiles that can be upgraded (doubled) by finding a scroll. Other helpful items to pick up include vitality for maintaining energy; a super cape for invincibility; an SOS raft for getting across water; keys for opening doors; arrows showing which direction to go; stars, dolls, and moons to restore vitality (energy); and power boots and a power helmet for breaking blocks. Hao can shoot certain blocks as well. Castles are made of blocks, some of which contain springs for jumping higher.

Notable Quotable:

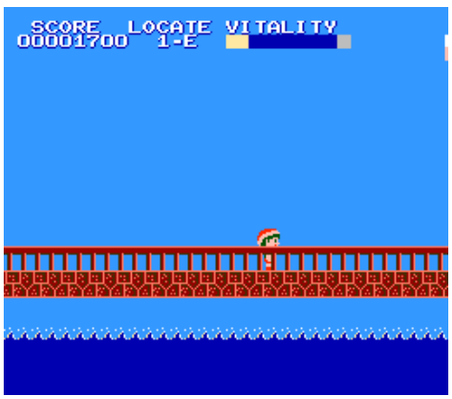
"Generic level design and graphical style make this bland side-scrolling platformer boring, even for this genre." —*Video Game Bible* (Trafford Publishing, 2002)

Notable Quotable:

"The castle segments were the developer's way of trying to break free from the norm . . . Guesswork is the biggest factor in getting through these stages, especially the later ones. There are some castles that are so convoluted that you need to exhaust every possibility, shoot or jump on every little brick. One single brick below your feet could be the one that leads you to a correct series of doors, and eventually to the exit. All of this just to find a talisman, leave the stage, and then begin the process anew. There are no intense boss battles, very few scenes with exciting combat, and no thought-provoking puzzles. You just guess your way to the exit, one brick at a time . . . tried to make up for the lack of excitement by including some tricky platformer sequences that require precision . . . For every enjoyable platforming scene, though, there's one that's just plain annoying." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"It's too damn bright and there is very little hue variation. The outer world's blue sky is just that—one solid color with no clouds—and the ground is a pretty light-gray stone pattern. Were it not for the occasional vegetation (trees and bushes and lazily placed green platforms here and there) it would look like you got lost in an empty Circuit City parking lot. Your main character Hao is so pale in an attempt to get a flesh color tone he winds up blending in with some of the background buildings . . . your most common enemies in this game can be found in your backyard! Bees, scorpions, snakes, dragonflies, groundhogs, and bats [can be] easily dispatched . . . lacks any kind of visual flair to keep you interested . . . Hao moves fairly sluggishly and has a problem maintaining momentum . . . Hao's first jump is just terrible, barely clearing roughly three blocks, but if you immediately jump right after landing the second jump will get you to where you want to go. What kind of hack programming is that? It isn't strategic to have to jump twice just to get to a higher platform, it's aggravating!" —Somewhere In The Midst Of Nowhere (somewhereinthe-midstofnowhere.wordpress.com)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

NARC

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

Approved by Just Say No International, a Reagan-era nonprofit organization dedicated to keeping young adults drug free, *NARC* puts you in the role of Max Force, a soldier in the War on Drugs. Your job is to stop drug kingpin Mr. Big, seize his contraband, and halt the felonious careers of the thugs, psycho clowns, dealers, pushers, gangsters, terrorists, and mobsters in his employ. Pit bulls, land mines, helicopters, and mutant bugs attack, complicating your mission. Equipped with a machine gun and a rocket launcher, you'll battle your way through nine levels of play, including an industrial ghetto, the city streets, Sunset Strip, Mr. Big's Office, and other seedy locations. In addition to busting bad guys you'll destroy vats of drugs, confiscate cash, and pick up color-coded safe cards for use in opening locked doors. At times you will commandeer a Porsche 911 Turbo Carrera NarcMobile equipped with superior handling and rapid acceleration. While in the car you can defeat bad guys with your standard weapons or you can simply run them over (the driving action scrolls right, like the rest of the game). If you're especially crafty you can trick enemies into walking over land mines. A cooperative simultaneous mode is available in which player two takes the role of Hitman, a warrior equally bent on ridding our great country of drugs. Based on Williams' 1988 arcade game, which had digitized graphics and sound effects, unlimited continues, and faster, more intense gameplay.

Notable Quotable:

"I miss the blood and guts of the arcade original, but even with them absent, *NARC* is a bold and daring title on the NES. Beyond the graphics, which are merely alright, you're still left with a good action/shooter." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"The controls are easy to use, but more constrictive than they probably should be. Dodging gunfire can be a little hard due to both the speed of your movement and the difficulty in telling where bullets are within the depth of the street. Otherwise moving around, aiming, and shooting are all pretty straightforward and accurate . . . Sound is pretty cool. The effects aren't amazing, but mostly clear for the NES and well-placed. Guns sound like guns, and you get the cute little pickup riff when you snag some drugs or bust a pusher. There are different themes for each level that sound nice and generally keep quietly to the background . . . while the feeling of taking on hordes of bad guys, and the number within the hordes themselves has been clearly diminished, the home version can still be rather fun . . . It's certainly worth playing through to the end, which you were quite unlikely to do in the arcade." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

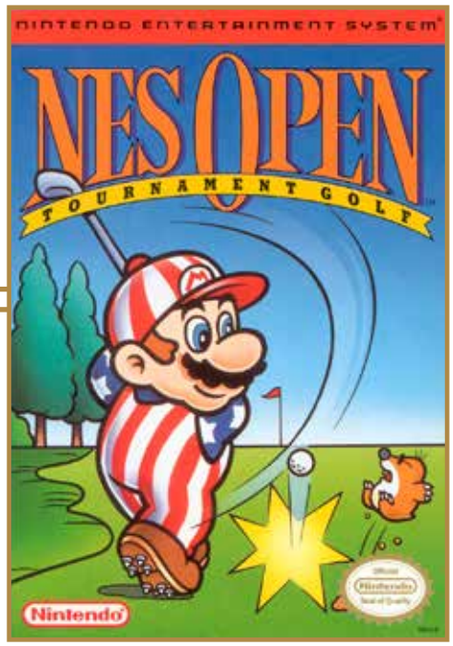
Insider Insight: I was surprised *NARC* came to the NES. Back in the late '80s and early '90s, Nintendo of America had a stringent censorship policy where they removed any possible thing that could potentially cause offense. As a precursor to *Mortal Kombat* from the same developers, the original *NARC* arcade game helped pioneer the use of digitized graphics in video games and added a healthy amount of gore for added appeal. Not just a bit of harmless blood, either; *NARC* had limbs flying all over the place, extreme amounts of violence, and even nudity. Given the controversial nature of the game, the last system you'd expect to find it on would be one produced by Nintendo.

You might expect the game to be a shadow of its former self with almost all the draw of the arcade game removed, but the final result is actually quite surprising. Sure, NES *NARC* is watered down to some degree, and it's not hard to pick out missing features from the original coin-op. Gone are the digitized visuals, the blood, the speech, and the decapitations. But it's still surprisingly violent. In fact, I'd argue it's the most aggressive game released for the NES. I originally picked up *NARC* and popped it into my NES expecting the worst—a truly horrid port that could never live up to the mindless fun of the arcade original. But in reality it's a competent port that's still a great deal of fun. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for more than 15 years

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

NES Open Tournament Golf

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D2.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Golf; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1991.



Utilizing a standard three-tap swing meter, *NES Open Tournament Golf* lets you play by yourself or with a friend. If played solo you are Mario, Nintendo's famous mascot, and you compete against five computer-controlled players: Luigi (Mario's brother), Steve, Mark, Tony, and Billy. There are three variations of play: Stroke, Match, and Tournament, where you can choose between 18- or 36-hole tournaments. You can play in Japan, the United Kingdom, or the United States. To register your name for a tournament, review your player data, select your clubs, and deposit prize money you must enter the Club House. You get extra prize money by winning the Longest Drive Contest or the Closest to the Pin Contest, or if you get a hole-in-one. You view the selected golf course from overhead and you see the action from directly behind your golfer when you are ready to hit the ball. When teeing up you should consider wind speed, remaining distance to the hole, swing speed, club choice, ball spin, and how straight and how hard you want to hit the ball. You should be careful to avoid rough, sand traps, water hazards, and areas that are considered to be out of bounds.

Memories: Most hardcore gamers I know think watching golf on television is incredibly boring, and they certainly don't play the sport. Golf video games are another story. *NES Open Tournament Golf* in particular is beloved by many. It certainly doesn't hurt that Mario and Luigi are featured in the game.

Notable Quotable:

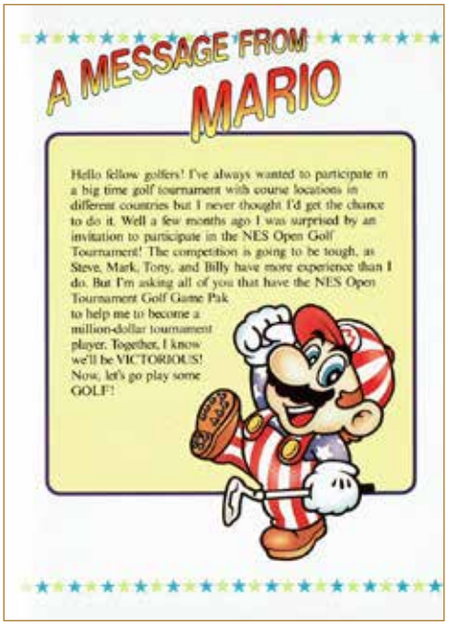
"The Famicom version is significantly different than the NES version. The Famicom version has 5 courses, losing the US course found in the NES version but gaining France, Australia, and Hawaii. The Famicom version also lacks the tournament mode." —Moby Games (www.mobygames.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Now that Mario has mastered medicine, it's only fitting that he should take up one of the most favored sports of those in the medical profession, golf! Don't think for a second that the links are any less of a battlefield than the Mushroom Kingdom. There's some stiff competition in this high-stakes, three-course pro circuit." —*Nintendo Power* (June 1991)

Notable Quotable:

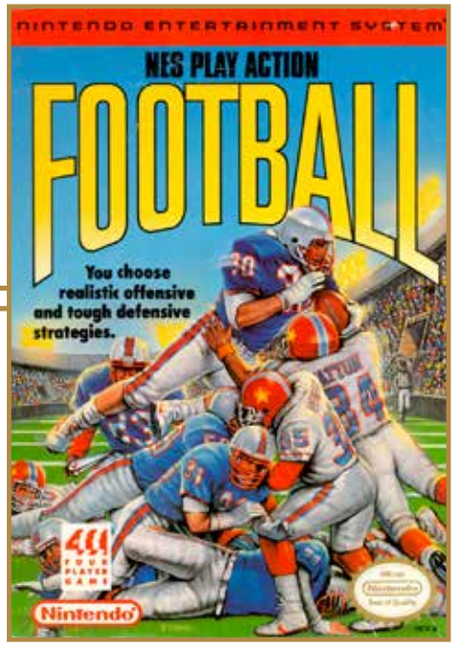
"*NES Open*'s simple gameplay and clean graphics make for a fast-paced, addictive experience. A slick user interface makes it easy to set up shots, and you can even apply backspin or topspin . . . *NES Open* is mainly played from a high overhead perspective, but you do get a close-up of the green, complete with arrows to indicate hills and valleys. A nifty close-up camera angle is employed as the ball approaches the cup, much like *Hot Shots Golf* . . . terrific golf game that was well ahead of its time." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

NES Play Action Football

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football; 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



Guide one of eight teams—Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, Chicago, Denver, Washington, New York, or Houston—in *NES Play Action Football*. The game lacks an NFL license so actual team mascot names aren't used, but real players from the 1989 season are featured (thanks to NFLPA licensing), including such standouts as Dan Marino, Joe Montana, Lawrence Taylor, and Mike Singletary. Each player has different skill attributes. Other features include cooperative play against the computer; a halftime show; replays; diving tackles; the stiff-arm; speed bursts; onside kicks; voice effects; sudden death (when the game ends in a tie); injured players hauled away on stretchers (and the resultant player substitutions); and line judges who bring out chains to measure close calls. The view of the field is from a diagonal/overhead perspective, which is unusual for a football title, and the game begins with an 8-bit rendition of the "National Anthem." To become the Power Bowl champion you must enter a tournament and beat all seven other teams. If you've got three friends who are into retro gaming, along with a multitap adapter, invite them over for a little gridiron action on the NES.

Memories: *Nintendo Power* Volume 19 is a strategy guide focusing on four-player games. *NES Play Action Football* is featured on the cover, with a quartet of football players in uniform gathered around a small TV playing the game. I've always enjoyed physical magazines like this and have hated seeing so many go out of business in the digital age.

Notable Quotable:
"Pre-release screenshots and information about this game made it appear as if it would have everything. Real players. Real teams (sort of). And lots of plays to choose from. But mark my words: appearances can be deceiving . . . the game was delayed for several months before it was finally released in late 1990. This heightened my anticipation, making me think that if it was delayed for so long it must mean they were trying to make it better. Right? Wrong." —Christopher Michael Baker (formerly at allgame.com)

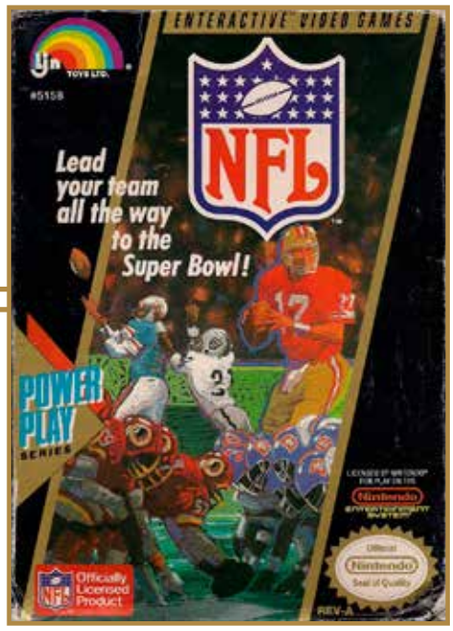
Notable Quotable:
"Fairly addictive for the time . . . Visually impressive for an 8-bit title . . . unique visual presentation . . . It's something close to an isometric perspective, but more like a birds-eye view tilted to 45 degrees. The team on offense will always be marching up the field to the 'northeast' corner of the screen, which works most of the time—but the orientation keeps you from being able to see much of what's happening on the right side of the field in favor of rendering more of the left. The bottom quarter of the action is also cut off in favor of a block of statistics and ever-present scoreboard . . . the option to team up with a partner and take on an opposing duo of humans is an interesting feature." —Lucas M. Thomas (www.ign.com), playing the NES game downloaded to the Wii

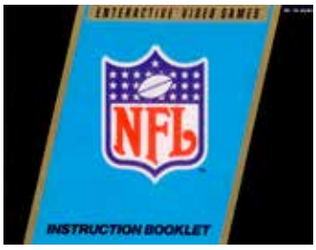
Notable Quotable:
"Surprisingly *Play Action* is equipped with an NFL Player's Association license, so actual player names and faces are displayed on the bottom of the screen! I have to give *Play Action* credit for incorporating some cool bells and whistles you don't even see in some modern football games. For example, when a player gets hurt trainers come out onto the field with a stretcher. And when a first down is in doubt the officials bring out the chains to measure up close! There's even some cheerleader action during halftime. As usual Nintendo incorporates a lot of little musical jingles into the game, which are actually quite catchy and memorable. There's no way this can possibly compete with the excellent *Tecmo Bowl* games, but *Play Action Football* represents a decent effort on Nintendo's part." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

(C) SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

NFL Football

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Atlus.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.



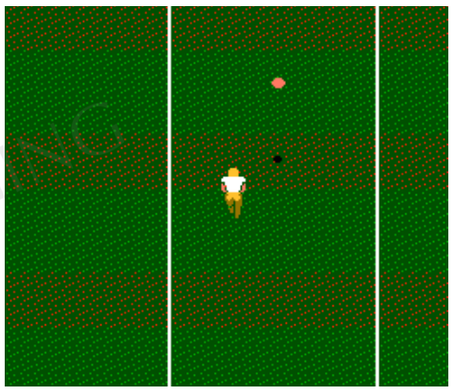


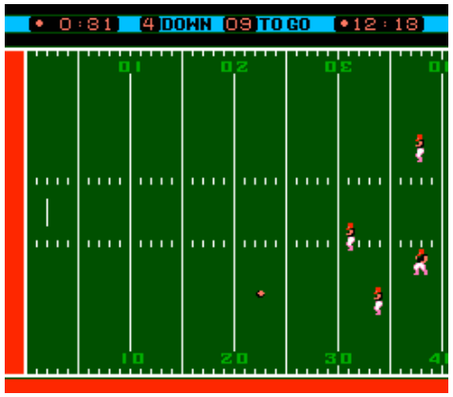
You can play as any of the 28 official NFL teams from the 1988 season in *NFL Football*, the first NES gridiron game to carry the official license of the National Football League. Each team has a letter grade assigned to each position: quarterback, running backs, receivers, tight ends, offensive line, defensive line, linebackers, secondary, special teams, and kickers. You can upgrade your team in two of these areas, but this increases the chance of random penalties and fumbles. Other features include coin toss, sacks, kickoffs (including onside kicks), and lots of offensive and defensive plays (including audibles). You call these plays in conjunction with a playbook poster that was originally included in the packaging (if you're a collector you need this, right?). You have direct control over running, passing, catching, kicking, punting, diving, jumping, blocking, and tackling. During passing sequences the camera zooms in for a close-up of the action. Despite the official NFL license there is no NFLPA license, meaning no real players appear in the game.

Memories: These days new NFL console games come out every year, with updated player stats, new gameplay features, etc. However, in 1989 it was a much different story. As far as a I know *NFL Football* for the NES was the first game with NFL branding since *NFL Football* for the Intellivision way back in 1979. A decade between official NFL video games? My, how times have changed!

Notable Quotable:
"While the sound effects are nothing special the graphics are pretty good, with a lot of movement on the field without flickering. We liked the fact that we could choose control of various players (more control than *John Elway's Quarterback*, less control than *Tecmo Bowl*), and the close-up screen of the pass receiver gives a nice point-of-view as well as allowing better opportunity to catch the ball." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"The passing mechanics are totally shot. The game essentially plays itself for about 20 seconds until a little cursor tells you which player you're controlling. After that you can press B to pass and the game will slow down while you select the player you want to pass to. When you select the player, you press the d-pad and the A button at the same time in the direction of the player to finally pass the ball. Can you imagine doing this several times during a play? I couldn't, and therefore, didn't. One plus: you can upgrade and customize your team. But if you can't control them well on the field what's the point? *NFL Football* showed me that I'm really not ready for some football and, even if you're a person who's inclined to be, you should still choose a different virtual pigskin." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

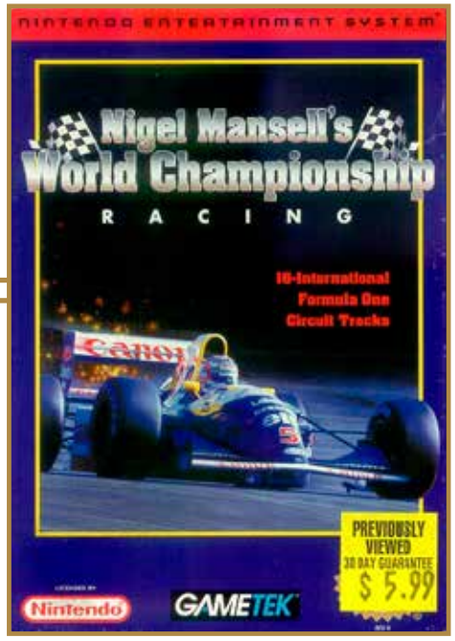




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Nigel Mansell's World Championship Racing

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Gremlin Graphics.
GAME TYPE: Formula-1/Indy Racing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.



British racing legend Nigel Mansell won the Formula One World Championship in 1992. The next year he won the CART Indy Car World Series and lent his name to *Nigel Mansell's World Championship Racing*, an NES game roughly patterned after its Super NES counterpart (complete with in-the-cockpit perspective). However the in-game information, such as lap time, mph, and the like is placed in a strip along the bottom of the screen (as opposed to varying locations around the top like in the SNES rendition), making the data a little less accessible. Also, though the NES version is certainly playable, the courses are more simplistic in design, the graphics aren't as sharp, and the animation isn't as smooth. On a more positive note the game does have some nice features, including selectable gears (automatic and manual) and wing types, selectable tires (hard, soft, and wet), pit stops (for changing tires), qualifying laps, and a Full Season mode. There are 16 twisting, turning tracks you can select from (each in a different country) for racing against other drivers. If you want to practice with no other cars on the course choose Improve with Mansell mode, where the disembodied head of the racer appears onscreen offering advice and where an arrow appears on the road, giving an indication of the driving line. In fact, before you try Season mode, or even Race a Single Circuit mode, you should probably get in some practice if you want to do well. Since it was released late in the life of the NES the game is fairly hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"*World Championship Racing* straddles the line of sim and arcade racer quite wonderfully. Before each race you have the option to change between transmissions, tires, and spoilers, and during the race you should probably switch out your tires at least once in the pit, but apart from these elements *WCR* keeps you racing without worrying about the intricacies . . . Because *World Championship Racing* came out in late 1993 for the NES the game's all but ignored, but it shouldn't be. If you're a fan of racing games on your NES, rejoice. This is one of the few keepers." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"It's crucial to use your brakes in the NES *Nigel*. Coasting into turns isn't as effective as in the 16-bit versions . . . The NES version features options similar to its SNES cousin, including Nigel's private driving lessons and a first-person perspective. However, as expected, everything is noticeably simplified. The tracks are not as complex, the car is a little sluggish, and the animations are not as fluid. Plus the awkward placement of onscreen prompters along the bottom of the screen makes it difficult to track your position or check your speed. If you've never gone 16-bit racing then 8-bit *Nigel* might provide a couple of thrills. It's a decent NES experience, just not a world champion." —*GamePro* (October 1993)

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

A Nightmare on Elm Street

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Side-Scrolling Combat/Adventure; 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

Freddy Krueger has been killing teens in their sleep. You and up to three friends, as Dream Warriors, must defeat him by searching for and collecting his scattered bones and then burning them in the high school furnace, a plot similar to 1987's *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*. This 8-bit take on the *Nightmare on Elm Street* film franchise, which began in 1984, offers more than typical running, jumping, obstacle avoiding, creature punching action (enemies include bats, hounds, snakes, zombies, and the like), though there's plenty of that. You'll enter buildings, a cemetery, and a junkyard to gather the aforementioned bones and battle Freddy Krueger in his various horrifying forms. If your sleep meter gets too low with inactivity (which drains the meter much faster), or by not drinking enough coffee (the drink refills your meter), the area will transform into the dangerous Dream World, which features Freddy at his toughest, and the enemies become their scarier counterparts. Fortunately here you can find icons that will turn you into a shuriken-throwing Shadow Warrior, a javelin-throwing Acrobat, or a magic-firing Necromancer. If you find a boom box you can "wake up" to return play to normal.

Memories: If you haven't watched it recently, take another look at the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. It holds up well and should belong on anyone's short list of true horror classics. I'm also a big fan of *Dream Warriors*, especially the Dokken theme song. Fans of the franchise could certainly do worse than playing this game, but it's too bad it's not compatible with the Power Glove—it would have been cool (at least in theory) to hack and slash as Freddy using that iconic (if problematic) peripheral.

Notable Quotable:
"This game, while providing a fairly large environment to explore, just isn't intense enough. The dream sequences are a nice angle, but the play doesn't change much—just the graphics. *Elm Street* tries to be *Simon's Quest* but comes up short." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Manages to set itself apart from being just another generic platformer, but fans of the movie will have a hard time being able to swallow having to fight off bugs, ghosts, and Frankensteins to catch a small glimpse of and an overly easy battle with their favorite horror movie icon . . . Freddy got the short end of the stick on this one and it's not helped with the gimmick of poorly implemented four-player support." —Brad Hicks (www.swankworld.com)

Insider Insight: In high school, my friend Jim and I owned all the *Elm Street* merchandise from the pull-string doll to the Freddy Fright Squirter. My favorite was a Freddy mask I wore while jumping out of the bushes and shouting my best Freddy "Rah!," terrifying folks while Jim videotaped their reactions.

In 1991, we prepared to attend our first convention together, the Fangoria Weekend of Horrors. Robert Englund (Freddy himself) was scheduled to be there, promoting *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare*. The night before we stayed up till the wee hours playing *A Nightmare on Elm Street* on my friend's NES.

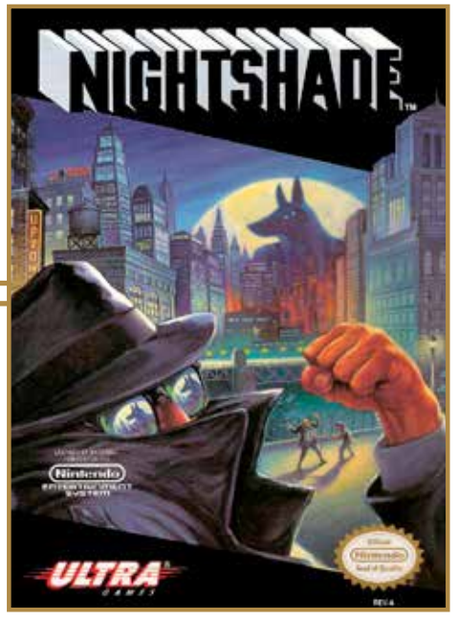
The "ordinary" teenager you controlled in the game was fearless, jumping and dodging while punching snakes, spiders, and bats. If you owned the four-player accessory you could portray a female. It was often the heroines in the *Elm Street* franchise who displayed the most badassery. The game had a fun old school haunted house feel, and turning off the lights immersed us even deeper into Freddy's world.

The next day, a sleep-deprived Jim and I shook hands with Robert Englund. I wanted to tell him how we stayed up the night before playing his game but I froze up as he signed my photo, "Robert Englund, '91." When I saw *Freddy's Dead* in the theater, I was surprised to discover there was a video game inspired death scene. Spencer finds himself in the middle of an NES-like game with Freddy controlling the enemies as he cackles, "Now I'm Playing with Power!" —Sean Tiedeman, filmmaker, director of *The King of Arcades*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Nightshade

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Graphic Adventure/Action; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



Evil crime boss Sutekh has taken over Metro City. Mark Gray, encyclopedia researcher by day and super sleuth Nightshade by night, has sworn that justice will be served and that he will bring down Sutekh. Clothed in a trench coat, fedora, and shades, Nightshade is a cross between Dick Tracy, Batman, and Sherlock Holmes. As this amalgamation of a hero, you must reason your way through more than 100 screens of point-and-click action and adventure, where you select icons (pick up, operate, use, fight, talk, and the like) on a menu to control many of Nightshade's activities. Not only will you examine clues, interrogate townsfolk, and find such useful items as keys, bombs, crowbars, screwdrivers, whistles, and gas masks, you must also fight—standard punching, kicking, jumping, and ducking—from time to time. If you lose the fight, you'll be placed in one of many death traps, forcing you to use your power of reason to help you escape. There are obstacles to jump over, but the appeal of this slowly paced game lies in using your brain to solve mysteries and escape death traps.

Notable Quotable:

"This game has a few cool ideas and an original type of gameplay that make it interesting. The control is poor, and the graphics are only average for this type of game. The quest is kind of fun, but only the first time around. They should have saved this one for the SNES." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The city-based action is slow paced, and while none of the puzzles are particularly clever, they're not too cryptic either. The world is huge and engaging, with tons of unique areas to explore and interesting yet bizarre characters to interact with! There're also some action elements such as having to rescue a girl from the outside of a burning building by climbing ladders and avoiding fire; moments like this break up the slow pace and add some variety. Occasionally you'll take part in combat screens where the objective is to drain your opponents' life bar using punches and kicks. Some enemies have entertaining attack patterns (especially the bosses), but the controls are clunky and delayed. This leads to many lost lives and it doesn't help that the game has no save option!" —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

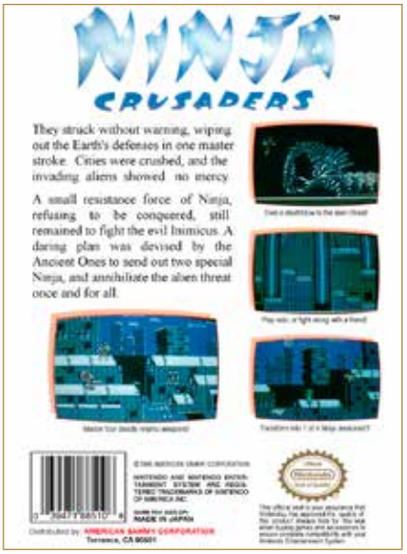
Notable Quotable:

"Clunky as the interface may seem at first, it works well enough for only having four buttons on the controller . . . an interesting graphical style that nails the comic book atmosphere . . . an incredibly free form approach to exploration that allows you to tackle its challenges in any order. Its open approach can be daunting, and it's not really made clear precisely what you need to do until you've spent some time getting acquainted with all the locales . . . The hit detection can be a bit sketchy at times . . . If you know exactly what you're doing the game can actually be beaten well under an hour provided you don't die. Still, even when you know where to go, you might get shredded in several fights and be in jeopardy of losing your hard-earned progress . . . one of the most dynamic and original NES titles out there that, despite its rough edges, should definitely be checked out by adventure enthusiasts." —Michael Plasket (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

SCOTT RUBIN PUBLISHING

Ninja Crusaders

PUBLISHER: American Sammy.
DEVELOPER: NMK.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



Aliens have attacked Earth, crushing its cities and wiping out its defenses. To save the day you must battle robots, bats, drones, wraiths, and other enemies through 10 levels of play: Civilization's Ruin, Watery Grave (adding swimming to the running, jumping formula), Canyon Trap, Lake of Chaos, Devil's Forest, Ironfist Castle, Hurricane Cruser [sp], Wraith's Lair, Shadow Village, and Temple of the Cursed. The game looks and plays enough like *Ninja Gaiden* to call it a clone or a copycat, not a mere homage, but the game does offer two-player simultaneous action (à la *Shadow of the Ninja*), and it lets you transform your ninja into one of four different animals, each with a different attacking power: tiger (claw swipe); scorpion (tail whip); eagle (no attacking ability); or flying dragon (waves of fire). Standard weapons include shurikens, a whip, a bo staff, and a sword, each with a different range and attack strength. Instead of a health bar the game features one-hit deaths, making it difficult to beat.

Notable Quotable:

"Take away *Ninja Gaiden*'s production values and nuanced gameplay, and you are left with *Ninja Crusaders*, a game created in its image but lacking even a fraction of its charm. Those craving more action in the same style would be better served playing *Vice: Project Doom*, a similar title from the same publisher." —RetroGameAge (www.retrogameage.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Even though the graphics and animation are less than perfect, the weapons, power-ups, and level bosses are excellent . . . Changing into various animals adds a new twist to this *Ninja Gaiden* wannabe . . . solid ninja action with a few neat twists . . . the bosses are HUGE and very tough . . . No intermissions, but the game is fast paced and fairly complex." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are just average for a late NES title, but they manage to create some pretty interesting environments with just a bit of details and the use of unusual colors, while the music is motivating enough without being especially memorable. The controls are tight and responsive, though, and the ninjas move fast and jump about three times their height . . . *Ninja Crusaders* is an overlooked side-scroller of above average quality, and while it doesn't quite have the flair of the classics, it is certainly worth a playthrough for obstinate players who don't mind the try-die-try routine, or for two friends looking for a quick old school romp." —Hugo Provost (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ninja Gaiden

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.

One of those legendary NES titles that gives it a reputation as a hardcore gaming platform, *Ninja Gaiden* is infused with style, flair, and hard-as-nails, hack-and-slash gameplay. Not only that, it kicked off what would quickly become one of the most revered series in the NES library. Ryu Hayabusa, the agile ninja players control, moves with fluidity, speed, and grace as he runs, crouches, climbs (ladders), flips, and jumps (including wall spring jumps and wall spring climbing jumps) his way through treacherous caves, icy cliffs, foreboding temples, and other venues of nonstop action. There are 20 areas in all spread over six acts (levels): Destiny, The Escape, The Chase, A Trap, Life or Death Combat, and The Fall of the Demon. Ryu battles enemies with quick sword thrusts, and he can slash lamps and other objects to reveal such pickups as points, spiritual strength, and the following weapons: throwing stars, windmill throwing stars, time freezes, a jump and slash technique, and an invincible fire wheel that rotates around Ryu. A powerful musical score and cinematic cutscenes enhance the brutally fun action. Tecmo's original arcade version of *Ninja Gaiden*, which was released in 1988, was a two-player beat-'em-up game similar to *Double Dragon*.

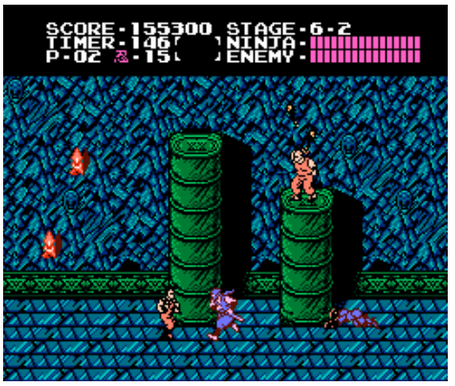
Memories: I was 22 and at the peak of my NES playing days when *Ninja Gaiden* hit store shelves. I had heard good things and bought it right away. Needless to say, I loved the game and spent many hours playing it (though I never beat it). The following year saw the release of *Ninja Gaiden II* and *Super Mario Bros. 3*. What a time to be a gamer!

Notable Quotable:

"The more I play this game the more it reminds me of Nintendo *Batman*. The platform, leaping-between-walls gameplay is very similar, but then, seeing as *Batman* was one of the best NES games of 1990, that can't be a bad thing . . . graphics aren't quite as stylish as *Batman*'s but they still do a creditable job. The sprites are detailed and well-animated, and the Tecmo Theater interludes help supply a lot of atmosphere . . . probably the best arcade style Ninja game on the NES, so anyone after some *Shinobi*-type shuriken shenanigans can't go wrong buying this." — *Mean Machines* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The classic Tecmo-created action game remains etched in my mind for a couple reasons. It featured actual cutscenes in an era when such things were considered extraordinary. Everyone remembers the simple but effective cinematic in which series hero Ryu Hayabusa stands atop a mountaintop and stares off into the distant landscape. Primitive by today's standards, sure, but I remember being blown away when I first set eyes on it. And then, of course, the difficulty—starts off easy enough, but advance through half a dozen areas and you find yourself in a fight for your very life. Funny that both of these defining characteristics have carried over through the years into modern day *Gaiden* sequels." —Matt Casamassina (www.ign.com), IGN Nintendo Editor in Chief



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: When I was a young NES gamer, I wanted nothing more than to have the video games I was playing feel like a movie. In today's world most games deliver the same excitement as watching a thrilling action flick or a bloodcurdling horror romp. The *Uncharted* and *Resident Evil* series of games are a prime example of this. *Ninja Gaiden* on the NES was the first game to fulfill my lofty expectations of games replicating the movie experience. The cinematic cutscenes blew me away! The story kept pushing me to finish the game, but unfortunately the difficulty eventually smacked me in the face like a ton of *Tetris* blocks. This is embarrassing to say, but I didn't experience the conclusion to *Ninja Gaiden*'s story until Galoob's Game Genie was gifted to me one glorious Christmas morning. After cheating to beat *Contra* for the first time I used the infinite lives code and completed *Ninja Gaiden*. The *Ninja Gaiden* franchise is beloved and still going strong, even outside of the series, as evidenced in part by the fact that Ryu Hayabusa is one of the main characters in the *Dead or Alive* fighting game franchise. —Mike Vito, writer at HeyPoorPlayer.com

Insider Insight: As I imagine many kids were back when *Ninja Gaiden* came out, I was completely blown away with the storytelling in those incredibly memorable cutscenes. I also knew that my mom enjoyed watching soap operas. Always being the type to want to share the things I love with other people (whether they like it or not), one day I decided that if she would give it a chance, my mom would surely LOVE the game's storyline. So, I asked her to sit and watch me play.

Looking back now as an adult, my mom was an incredibly patient woman. The story is completely bonkers, and while it holds up when viewed with a thick layer of nostalgia (and a healthy love of anime), it's not exactly the kind of stuff my mom was into, especially the groan-inducing "love story" between Ryu and Irene. Still, my mother, bless her heart, sat there and watched me blast through the game, and try and explain the story segments, and die over and over towards the end. As a parent myself now I appreciate this indulgence by my mom even more, and I can't wait for my kids to do the same thing to me. —Kris Randazzo, host of the *Stone Age Gamer* podcast, writer for *Nintendo Force Magazine*

Insider Insight: One random day when I was a kid, I went to hang out with my cousins David and Steven, and when I got to their house they were playing a game they had borrowed that I had never seen or heard of before called "Ninja Gayden" (yes, we called it that, and don't act like you didn't). I had no idea what the game was, but I knew it looked AWESOME! Suddenly the day had gotten a lot less random.

It was pretty clear that *Ninja Gaiden* drew inspiration from *Castlevania* by the way it looked and controlled, but it played so much faster that it was a totally different experience. Plus, as with many longtime gamers, this was one of the first times, if not THE first time, that I had ever seen a cutscene in a video game. Expanding on the story outside of the manual or the back of the box was almost unheard of back then. And the fact that the cutscenes drew us all in and made us want to know more about what was happening was a really cool feeling to experience for the first time.

Granted, no one could get past stage three at that point, but the cinematics seemed so new and cool. Not only did we want to get farther to see what the next stage was like in terms of gameplay, we wanted to see what would happen next in the story. I gained more appreciation for the game that summer when another cousin, Kelly, who lived out of town, came up to visit, game in tow. He also had a *How to Beat Nintendo Games* VHS tape from *Game Players* that had a segment on *Ninja Gaiden*. Watching him play the game, I finally got to see some of the later stages and cutscenes that I had been wondering about for months. Later, when I got my own copy of the game, I played it tirelessly until I was one of the few people I knew who could say that they beat the game—it was that difficult. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

QUARTO PUBLISHING

Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

As with the first game in the series, *Ninja Gaiden II* offers plenty of manly hack-and-slash action supplemented by killer platforming, dramatic music, and sweeping, anime-style cutscenes. Gameplay is similar as players run, turn flips, battle enemies with quick sword thrusts, and jump off walls and over fire, spikes, and other obstacles. However, this time Ryu can throw fireballs, climb on walls (as opposed to just ladders), and split his body into three for a multiple attack, which is a cool and powerful effect. In addition, the game has more detailed backgrounds, some fresh (if frustrating) environmental hazards, such as mountain winds that can whisk Ryu into deadly chasms, and new characters, including the demonic villain Ashtar, who wields the titular Sword of Chaos. Other significant enemies include Dando the cursed (skilled in hand-to-hand combat), Baron Spider (half man, half spider who controls spiders), Funky Dynamite (cyborg lizard equipped with fire bombs), and Naga Sotuva (underwater dragon who attacks with his huge claws).

Notable Quotable:

"This has got to be the best looking Nintendo game ever made! The backgrounds are spectacular and the cinema displays are absolutely amazing! Excellent game play makes this super sequel one of the best new games of the year! A truly AWESOME challenge!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"This game had everything that made the first what it was: from the slick graphics and amazing music, to the awesome cutscenes and silky smooth gameplay. But rest assured that like the original, *Ninja Gaiden II*'s difficulty level is nothing to scoff at. This game eats 8-bit novices for breakfast to this day." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Ninja Gaiden II* the 43rd-greatest NES game

Notable Quotable:

"Sequels are difficult to judge. If the game maker changes the scenario too much, what's the point of making a sequel? But if the thrills are pretty much the same, why bother making it at all? The *Super Mario* games manage to balance these perfectly . . . the *Ninja Gaiden* sequel less so. It's fun, but if you won the first game you'll beat this one, too . . . without enjoying the sense of discovery you had the first time around!" —*How to Win at Nintendo Games 4* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1991)

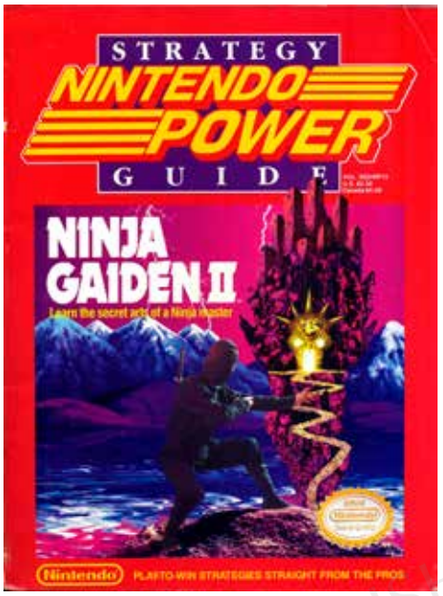
Notable Quotable:

"Excellent sequel . . . The graphics are extraordinary; much better than what we've come to expect in an NES ninja or martial arts game. The cinematic shots between scenes and the eerie sequence that's lit by lightning are unbelievable, adding new depth and drama to the play. The music is good, but the sound effects are better . . . Highly honed arcade skills and carefully thought out strategies are needed to complete the higher levels . . . one of the best action games around." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"*Ninja Gaiden II* continued the storyline, and in doing so it took the storytelling to an even more sophisticated level. It presented its narrative with more stylish framing, more impressive visual effects, more intense music, and even more shocking twists. What makes this such a great sequel, though, is that its creators didn't stop at merely beefing up the story bits. *Ninja Gaiden II* also plays better than the original, which itself was a game with a compelling rhythm to its breakneck speed action . . . It's a bigger, brasher game in every way, and it's one of the finest twitch reflex experiences on any 8-bit platform." —Polygon (www.polygon.com), which ranked *Ninja Gaiden II* the 22nd-greatest NES game

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Insider Insight: *Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos* was one of the most highly anticipated NES sequels among my elementary school crowd. I never owned the game growing up, nor did I have its predecessor, but I played them plenty with friends, and specifically recall my buddy Asher receiving *Ninja Gaiden II* right at its initial release and asking me to come over and play it. He also mentioned excitedly that the primary antagonist was called "Ashtar," and at age 10, I somehow felt convinced that his parents only agreed to buy him the game because of this incidental likeness, as silly as that now sounds. (Kids can think in interestingly illogical ways!)

And tackling it over many weekends at his house, we were absolutely blown away by the game's cinematic pacing and nonstop action. Each successive stage revealed more of Ryu Hayabusa's quest to neutralize the mysterious sword of the game's title and rescue his kidnapped girlfriend, Irene. Level by level Asher and I pushed, jumped, and strategized our way through the platformer, finally managing to win after many hours of play.

Beating *Ninja Gaiden II* ended up as the peak of my NES experience with the franchise, as somehow I never got into *Ninja Gaiden III*, despite it coming out the following year. Fast forward just a short time later, though, and *Street Fighter II* burst into arcade popularity starring a character named Ryu. Could he possibly be the same Ryu from the *Ninja Gaiden* series, I wondered? Alas, it was not to be; the games have different publishers and apparently Ryu is a common enough name in Japan. But the similarity sparked an interest that, post-NES, led me to the next game genre I would love, the one-on-one arcade fighter. Thank you *Ninja Gaiden* and *Ninja Gaiden II*! —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

Insider Insight: At the end credits of the first *Ninja Gaiden* it says, "See you next," and none of us kids knew what they meant, exactly. Was Tecmo just saying that they would see us in the next game that they made, or did they mean that they were going to bring us a sequel? I tried to keep my eyes and ears open for news of a sequel, as much as one could in the dark days of the early '90s with no internet.

Finally, one day while flipping through the pages of the latest issue of *Game Players* magazine, I spotted an ad saying, "Coming Soon" for *Ninja Gaiden II*! I was so excited to know that a sequel was indeed coming out and I couldn't wait to read about and eventually play it. I did get to play it much sooner than I had thought possible when that summer my friend Troy showed up at my house with a brand new copy in hand. I didn't even know that it was out yet!

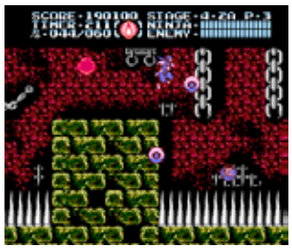
Seeing that opening scene for the first time and hearing the introductory song made me so happy! In fact, it's one of my favorite openings to a video game to this day. Over the next few weeks we tried and tried but could NOT pass the second stage, but one day I FINALLY beat the second boss. And like a man possessed I kept beating stage after stage. I felt like nothing could stop me!

Then for some reason while in stage six, Troy and I started talking about how I wouldn't swear at the time and he wanted to hear me say a bad word. He even threatened to shut off the NES if I didn't. I contemplated that for a little while, and when it seemed as though he would in fact turn off the console, and I would lose all that progress, I did utter a minor offensive expletive, much to his surprise, and I kept on playing. I wasn't able to beat the game that day, but I did make it to the first of the last three bosses and that made it worth it to me. And besides, at least I didn't drop the "F" bomb. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ninja Gaiden III: The Ancient Ship of Doom

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/ Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



Another great game in the popular series, *Ninja Gaiden III* begins with a cutscene of a Ryu impersonator sending the beautiful Irene Lew plummeting off a cliff, effectively setting the stage for the final game in the NES *Ninja Gaiden* trilogy. Players once again guide a crisply controlled Ryu Hayabusa as he runs, jumps, flips, and battles his way through gorgeous levels (jungles, caves, the desert) and a variety of enemies (lots of robots and monsters in this case). The weapons of the previous two games return but Ryu does have some new attack methods, including vacuum wave art, which is a blade that can be thrown up and down, and a dragon spirit sword upgrade that increases the range of Ryu's standard attack. Ryu can also attack while hanging from a wall, climb to the top of a wall (as opposed to having to jump to the opposite wall first), and move hand-over-hand via pipes and jungle ivy. Bosses to battle include Mantiss Warrior, Night Diver, Great Kogane!, and Sandeater.

Notable Quotable:

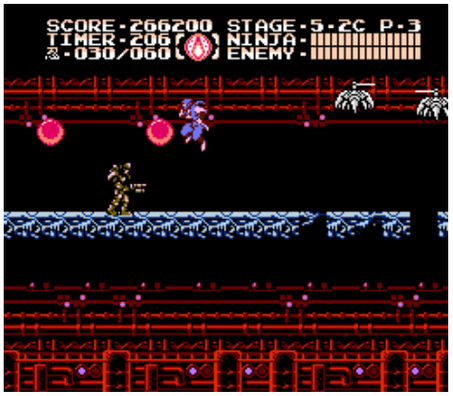
"The US version of the game was actually made even more difficult, and in some ways it hurts the game. Enemies deal more damage and the difficulty curve ramps up a lot sooner. By the midpoint it isn't uncommon to see five or six enemies spawn at once." — ClassicGames.Net (www.classic-games.net)

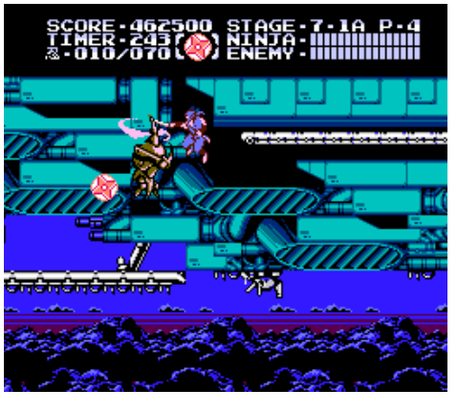
Notable Quotable:

"Now this is a sequel! All of the classic power-ups and combat skills of the ninja master of the 8-bit market have been retained. An all new novelistic plot has been added, along with new cinema displays as well. Everything from bosses to backgrounds are truly stupendous." — *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The always-cinematic *Ninja Gaiden* saga concluded with another brilliantly subtitled game chock full of the unapologetic brutality the series was known for. Returns had diminished a bit by the time this one was released in 1991—only sports games can survive annualized sequels—but between its intense action, the advanced-for-its-day storytelling, and the lovably absurd plot, there's a lot of mileage left in this ancient ship." — Garrett Martin (www.pastemagazine.com)





Insider Insight: The NES was getting long in the tooth by summer 1991. I'd purchased a Sega Genesis the previous year, and the SNES was just around the corner so I was giving my NES less and less playtime. I purchased *Ninja Gaiden III* without hesitation as I love the series' fast-paced, precision gameplay, thumping music, graphics that pushed the boundaries of the NES, and, most of all, the cutscenes. I worked tirelessly at the games until I finished them, just to see the end.

This experience with the first two games in the series led me to believe that the third would be just as difficult, maybe even more so. Fortunately this is a more refined *Ninja Gaiden*. Although the challenge level is still worthy of a ninja master, there are key improvements beyond a graphical upgrade that make the game a more pleasant and rewarding experience than its predecessors. Special items are now revealed without the need to slash them first, Ryu is even more responsive to control inputs, and enemies no longer respawn just because the screen scrolls left and right a little. Some may lament that there are only five continues instead of an unlimited number, but this encourages you to put down the controller and try again another time instead of beating your head against the wall endlessly.

Back in the day, a casual mention of the game's brutal difficulty during a lunchroom conversation led to the forming of strong friendships as school pals came over to my house to play the game and we'd take turns trying to reach the end. Helping each other figure out the tougher parts fostered a sense of camaraderie not possible in a versus game. —Matt Daley, cohost of the Atari 5200 Super Community podcast.

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ninja Kid

PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1986.

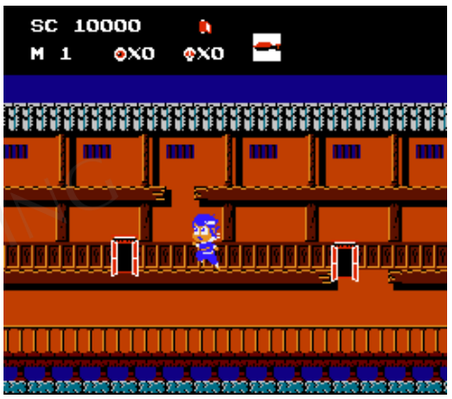
As the Ninja Kid, you must battle the monsters of Demon Island and avoid the holes and other traps they have set up. You can run, jump, and fly (using a kite), and you can use a variety of weapons, including a dagger (the primary weapon), an iron star, a boomerang, and a fireflame. After using a special weapon the maximum number of times your weapon reverts to a dagger. You can call on Pegasus for use as a protective shield and Big Eagle to stop the demons' movements. Also, an Old Witch will throw magic sand at enemies and a whistle can be used to call on friendly demons. There are four different fighting fields that are accessible via a Demon Island Map: Guerilla Warfare, Poison Fields, Dog Fight, and Blazing Inferno. Objectives in the fields include collecting 10 demon spirits, lighting 10 candles, or defeating 10 demons. After you clear the four fields you can enter Demon Hell, which features vertical scrolling (as opposed to side scrolling) action. Here you will not be able to use any of your special weapons.

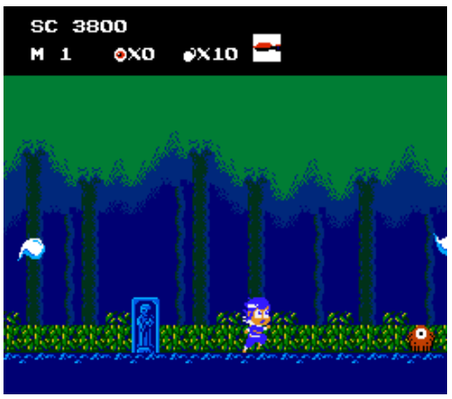
Notable Quotable:

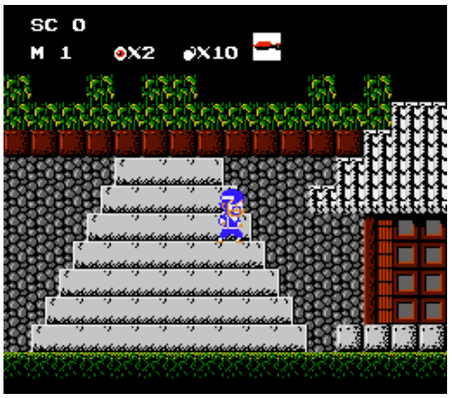
"Loaded with the kind of challenge, depth, and variety that make it very difficult to stop playing. In fact, there is so much variety that each of the fighting fields would make a respectable game on its own . . . Graphics are beautifully detailed and colorful . . . Music and sound effects are good . . . *Ninja Kid* may feature a very small hero, but the gaming pleasure it gives is very large indeed." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1986)

Notable Quotable:

"Doesn't have a traditional ending . . . There is no final boss. There is no end screen. Over time you'll encounter the same backgrounds and same overworld designs . . . The music isn't going to make your ears bleed, but it's an extremely repetitive loop, and you hear it the whole game . . . Controlling Ninja Kid is really similar to how you control Master Higgins in *Adventure Island*. The momentum is hard to build up in short distances, and without that momentum jumping high is much more difficult. Overall I find the game fun, albeit repetitive." —Candi's Classic Game Shrine (YouTube)







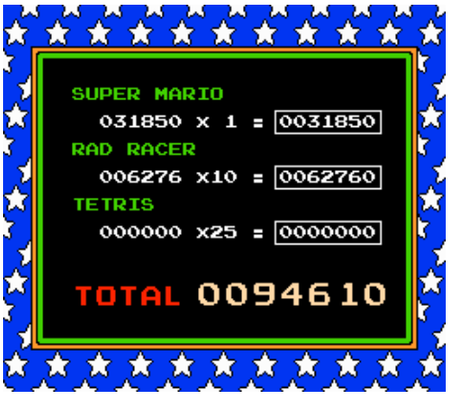
Notable Quotable:

"Back in the '80s, I had long seen the Nintendo at friends' houses. When I finally got my own console I was given the choice of picking out any additional game I wanted (aside from the *Super Mario Bros.* and *Duck Hunt* that came with it). I was already aware of *The Legend of Zelda*, *Metroid*, and even *Castlevania*. But for reasons I've long forgotten I picked a strange game called *Ninja* Kid. Based on a Japanese manga series called *GeGeGe no Kitaro-Yōkai Daimakyō*, it was actually a pretty successful game in Japan, being the 8th best-selling game on the Famicom in 1986. When it was ported to the states they changed the hero from Kitaro, a Ghost Tribe member combating monsters using his hair, to a random Ninja Kid who always fought with a weird smile. I played this game a lot, mainly because after *Super Mario* I had nothing else to play. Plus no one wanted to swap/borrow *Ninja Kid* for one of the games they had in their collection. There were aspects I really enjoyed, from the catchy music to the creepy enemy designs. The levels also mixed up the gameplay with a variety of strange objectives." —Peter Tieryas (kotaku.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Nintendo World Championships 1990

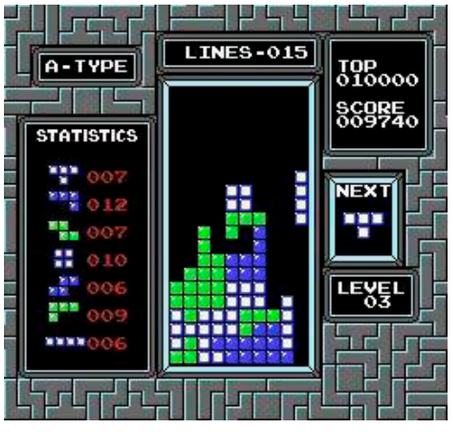
PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo/Square.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Sports Car Racing/Action Puzzle; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



Created for the Nintendo World Championships, a touring competition that was part of PowerFest 1990, this specially produced cartridge contains modified versions of three NES classics: *Super Mario Bros.* (collect 50 coins), *Rad Racer* (race on a special NWC course), and *Tetris* (earn the high score). During the official competition gamers had 6:21 to play all three mini-games, but the cartridge itself contains dipswitches that can alter the time limit. Often considered one of the holy grails of 8-bit gaming, *Nintendo World Championships 1990* is extremely rare. Only 90 numbered cartridges were produced and they were given to competition finalists. Even rarer is the specially made version housed in gold-colored casing awarded to winners of a contest in the July/August 1990 issue of *Nintendo Power*. Only 26 of these beauties were produced, making it arguably the most desirable video game cartridge in existence.

Notable Quotable:

"The NWC 1990 was a big, nine-month-long, 30-city tour. I got to play *Super Mario Bros.*, *Rad Racer*, and *Tetris*. I ended up in Hollywood. It was a really good time. I met a lot of really incredible people I try to keep in touch with. It's cool to see the resurgence and interest in it after all these years . . . I didn't have an NES at the time. I had a Game Boy. I had *Tetris* and *Super Mario Land* and kind of just played with that. One of my buddies had an NES that I loved to play. I'd go over to his house sometimes . . . It was a relief [when the competition was over] more than anything. It was a lot of hard work in a way, traveling around, sitting in the back seats of cars, riding across the country . . . It was huge. So many games set up. So many people there. It felt like you were in a movie." —Thor Aackerland (via Media Glitch on YouTube, 2016), winner of the 1990 Nintendo World Championships (12–17 age division)



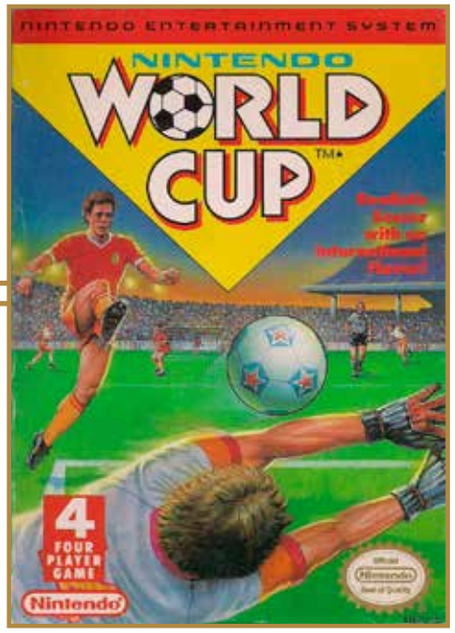
Dynamite Goes Nutsy For Nintendo at the 1990 Nintendo World Championships

On the competition bandstand, six contestants feverishly compete for the Nintendo Wizard title!

SCAN PRESERVING

Nintendo World Cup

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Technōs Japan.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer; 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



A flagship title for the NES's four-player adapter, *Nintendo World Cup* offers 13 selectable teams, each rated according to such attributes as speed, passing, and defense. Each team is granted five super kicks per half, and the players look like the guys from *River City Ransom*, *Super Dodge Ball*, and *Crash 'n' the Boys: Street Challenge*, since the game, along with those titles, is part of the *Kunio-kun* series in Japan. The overhead view action displays a horizontal field and scrolls in all directions, and there are six different field types: grass, soil, sand, bumpy, concrete, and ice. Corner kicks, throw-ins, headers, super kicks, and high-power kicks are all part of the fun, and there are no penalties for sliding and tackling opponents when you're on defense. Interestingly, gamers have direct control over just one of the players on their team, but can order other members of the team to pass, tackle, shoot, and dive. Prior to each match players of this fun, innovative game must set their team's offensive and defensive strategies, further differentiating the cartridge from other soccer titles. In addition to being a standalone cart, the game was also included in the *Super Spike V'Ball/Nintendo World Cup Soccer* combo cartridge that shipped with the NES Sports Set.

Notable Quotable:

"*Goal!* was a terrific soccer cartridge, so why get this one? Because there's a greater diversity in the players, and the multiple surface option guarantees that you'll never get bored! The figures are a little cartoony—sort of like a field of Barney Rubbles—but that doesn't really detract from the play value." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games 4* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

After the abysmal showing of the *Sega World Cup* game a few issues ago, my one consoling thought was that this had to be a vast improvement. Boy, I was wrong. *NWC* takes football games to a new low. The game system is a total mess, and only having one player under your control is a farce—why can't you switch between team members to allow for carefully prepared attacks? As it stands, *NWC* gives the impression that soccer is all about one player standing just outside the box while the rest of the pitch is determined by random events. I really think it's about time for a decent console footy game, don't you?" —*Mean Machines* (March 1991)

Insider Insight: The first time I saw *Nintendo World Cup* I thought it looked silly. Those big-headed players with their strange expressions didn't lend themselves to a realistic football (soccer for Americans!) game, and I was a serious football fan. Although I thought it looked stupid, it was my love of the so called "beautiful game" that made me stick with it. I'm glad I did, because the more I played *Nintendo World Cup* the more alluring it was. Behind those goofy looking players was a very playable game that was much better than the early *Soccer* for the system. I didn't learn until years later that the game was part of Technos' popular Japanese *Kunio-kun* series that also included an arcade and ZX Spectrum favorite of mine—*Renegade*. My brother had the same initial opinions as me, and it was me who made him stick with it. In the end he found he enjoyed it even more than I did and promptly went out and picked up the Game Boy version so we didn't have to go to our neighbor's house to play it anymore! —Kieren Hawken, an Englishman who has been writing about video games for 15 years

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Nobunaga's Ambition

PUBLISHER: Koei.
DEVELOPER: Koei.
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy; 1–8 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.

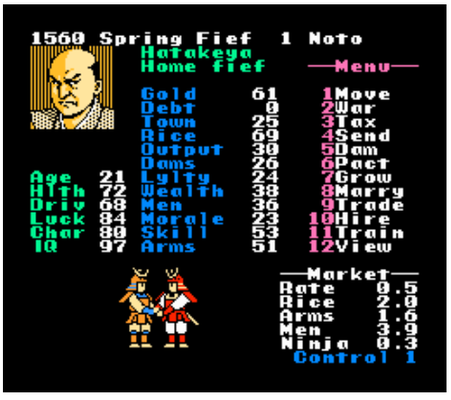
A sophisticated game oozing with history and detail, *Nobunaga's Ambition* is set during the Warring States period of sixteenth-century Japan. The game puts you in the role of Nobunaga Oda, a *daimyo* (feudal lord) with ambitions of becoming a Shogun and ruling the entire nation. Actually there are several historical daimyos to choose from, each rated according to age, health, drive, luck, charm, and intelligence. Daimyos rule a single fief but can conquer more as the game wears on. This is achieved by recruiting soldiers, training an army, buying weapons, negotiating with other daimyos, hiring ninjas to attack enemies, increasing peasant morale, dealing with natural disasters, and much more. Battles take place on a top-down hex map consisting of plains, mountains, hills, water, towns, and castles. Each player takes turns selecting from 21 different commands, including move (soldiers or the daimyo), attack, bribe, flee, tax, trade, marry, build, and view.

Notable Quotable:

"One of the best turn-based wargames available for the NES . . . exciting not only because of its mechanics and complexity, but also because of its historical significance. KOEI was careful to root *Nobunaga's Ambition* deep in Japanese feudal history . . . just because this game might teach you a couple things doesn't mean that it isn't fun. The sheer number of interlocking influences dictating how your power will progress is enough alone to make *Nobunaga's Ambition* a great game . . . The only problem with *Nobunaga's Ambition* is that only one game at a time can be saved on the cartridge." —Jeff Irwin (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Koei's strategy games are practically a genre unto themselves, and they have only enjoyed limited cult success in the US. In fact, they're often billed as 'historical simulations' rather than games. Lead designer Shou Kibasawa is a tactical genius who realizes that domestic and military strategies are interconnected, and that fielding armies can only be accomplished after building an infrastructure to support them. As a result *Nobunaga's Ambition* boasts a level of strategic complexity few other series can come close to matching." —*Next Generation* (September 1996), where *Nobunaga's Ambition* (NES, SNES, and PC) is ranked the 34th-greatest video game of all time



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Nobunaga's Ambition II

PUBLISHER: Koei.
DEVELOPER: Koei.
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy; 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.

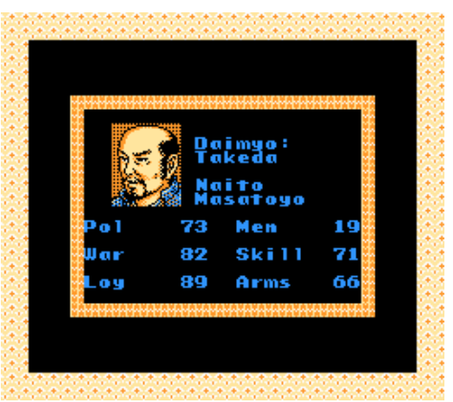
Nobunaga's Ambition II is an improvement over the first game in the series thanks to enhanced graphical detail and the introduction of samurai. You can send 400 different samurai into battle, each with distinct abilities and personalities. Only four players can play simultaneously this time around, but the game does offer five skill levels, 38 battle maps and castles, and two scenarios: Warlord Rivalry (starts March 1560) and Nobanaga's Ambition (starts March 1582), the latter of which finds Nobunaga Oda already in control of central Japan. Gameplay consists of selecting commands (move, tax, grow, marry, trade, build, give, assign, and the like) from the main display, with the view switching to a top-down hex map whenever war breaks loose. The objective is to control more and more fiefs, each of which varies according to such data as gold, food, land value, trade, culture, castle defense, soldiers, and more. If you die on the battlefield, get assassinated, or die from natural causes you can choose a successor and keep playing.

Notable Quotable:

"*Nobunaga's Ambition II* feels less like a sequel and more of an update. It expands what are the same basic scenarios from the first game while adding some new features (samurais do your bidding!) and a helluva lot more fiefs! . . . Slaps a glossy coat of paint atop the drab-looking original game, but from a non-Koei fan's perspective fails to do much of anything new. The production values are obviously much higher. The graphics are cleaner and the colors more vibrant and alive with the passion of the daimyos. The historical perspective is interesting and Koei's attention to detail, like usual, is exhausting." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

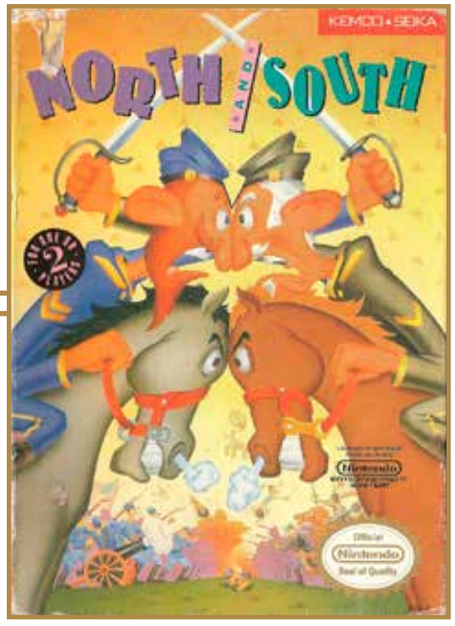
"The game is composed of maps and menus, but the details are impressive, with individual portraits for samurai and icons showing events. The music and sound are pleasant . . . Fixes the problems of its NES predecessor, featuring better art and vastly improved controls. An issue with the first game is that it gives you menu options on the map screen for movement instead of using the d-pad directly, like you'd expect. The menus are also a lot cleaner, having been organized into categories, while the previous entry had every action placed on screen in a long wall of text." —Karen Niemla, *Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the NES Library (1985–1995)*



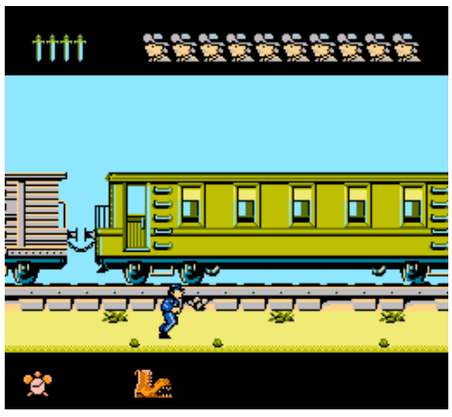
©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

North and South

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Infogrames.
GAME TYPE: Action/Strategy; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



An offshoot of the Belgian comic book series *Les Tuniques Bleues*, *North and South* lets you relive the Civil War and, as the Union or the Confederacy, even rewrite a portion of American history; namely, the years 1861–1864 (1865 is unavailable as a starting year since the South was largely decimated by that point). In this fairly simplistic game (at least relative to the genre) you direct your troops strategically from state to state around a map of the eastern US so they can capture as many unoccupied or enemy towns as possible. You can combine units to strengthen weaker ones (the maximum is 3 cannons, 9 cavalry, and 18 infantry), evaluate the strength of and attack opposing armies, rob a moving train (during special side-scrolling platformer stages), and contend with such dangers as Indian and Mexican attacks, bad weather, and European reinforcements. Battle scenes take place via an overhead perspective, making the horses, soldiers, bridges, houses, and trees look very small. The action is lighthearted in tone and appearance, despite the wartime theme, and games can easily last under 20 minutes.



Notable Quotable:

"Sacrifices the reality of supply lines, troop morale, and military production for a more action oriented approach . . . the production of new units is solely based on how many regions you control, and things like capturing forts are decided through a side-scrolling action sequence. Even the military engagements themselves require quicker reflexes than wits . . . very easy to learn . . . two-player mode greatly enhances the game's replay value . . . Your computer-controlled opponents generally put up a poor fight and can easily be defeated with a little practice . . . subpar graphics . . . Not much background music, but battle sounds (such as bugle calls) are decent." —Zachary Knowlton (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"There's more to the game than just moving your soldiers around a giant map . . . you get to switch between several different characters, including a regular group of soldiers, a guy with a cannon, and soldiers on horseback . . . you will have to plan your attacks carefully and use the right unit types for the job. This is trickier than it sounds, and at first it's downright frustrating. But after a few tries you'll get the hang of it and see the beauty in simplicity . . . 2D side-scrolling levels feel undercooked; they run too fast and are often too easy. Thankfully you can fiddle with the difficulty a bit, and a second player can make things more interesting, but I still wish they could have come up with something better for these pivotal base seizing missions." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

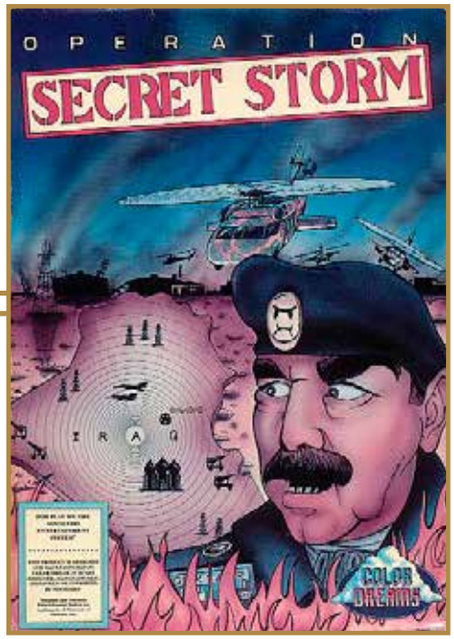
Insider Insight: There are certain games that are generally associated with home computers and others that are usually referred to as console titles. *North and South* is definitely from the former, so when I discovered the NES version I was surprised. Not just because it struck me as a game best suited to computers, but also because of its bizarre origins. *North and South* was based on a relatively obscure comic strip called *Les Tuniques Bleues* that few people outside of Belgium and France had heard of. Even releasing the game on popular European home computers back in the day was seen as a gamble, so to discover that it made it to North America was staggering. Although the game is similar to the Infogrames originals, Kemco's conversion does remove the small references back to the comic strip from the game's intro sequence.

At first it seemed unnatural to play the game with a joypad because in the Atari ST version that I grew up with the action relied heavily on the mouse, with the joystick used for the arcade-like sections. This makes the strategy sections a little fiddly at first, but you soon get used to it, and I'd bet that if you'd never played the 16-bit computer originals you wouldn't know any better. In fact, when I discovered the game it quickly became one of my favorite titles for the console. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for more than 15 years

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Operation Secret Storm

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams.
DEVELOPER: Color Dreams.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



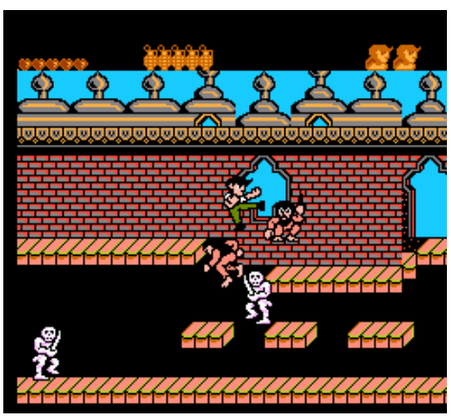
A product of the George H. W. Bush era, *Operation Secret Storm* was designed to capitalize on the Persian Gulf War and Operation Desert Storm, where nations, led by the US, waged war against Iraq after the country invaded Kuwait. Gamers guide top CIA agent George on a mission to save oil refineries in the Gulf and stop further production of chemical and biological warfare weapons. George must work his way through 10 areas, including oilfields, an oil refinery, scud missile sites, a village, and a desert airstrip. To battle the trigger happy soldiers, chemical warfare specialists, guards wielding lead pipes, and mutated animals he will encounter George can punch, kick, jump-kick (the most effective attack method), and do a short knee attack. If he has ammunition, he can fire bullets and throw grenades. The action moves along on a single plane and stops when George faces one or more enemies, then the screen will continue scrolling after they are defeated. It's obvious from the beginning of play that this is an unlicensed game, and not just because of its terrible music, lame graphics, and shoddy gameplay—controls and collision detection are miserable and the protagonist slides when he stops. Saddam Hussein, who George battles at the end of the game, is pictured on the front of the box, with the word "Dick Tator" written on his partially obscured nametag, something Nintendo would never have allowed. Ironically, considering the fact that George fights for America, the first boss he will encounter is an eagle. A very hard-to-find game.

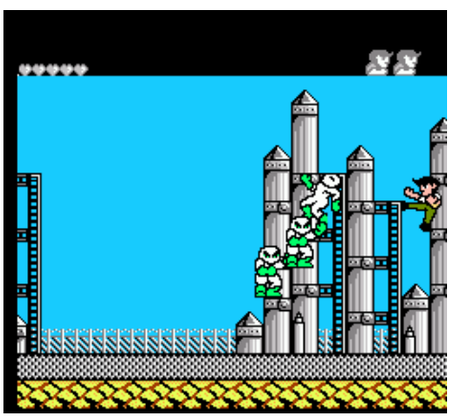
Notable Quotable:

"Color Dreams/Wisdom Tree has published some of the finest dreck the NES has to offer, but *Operation Secret Storm* is a war crime of the highest order . . . Crazy enemies and ideas don't sell without substantial gameplay and Secret Storm has none. Each level is short and poorly designed, consisting of some vaguely Middle Eastern backgrounds, a couple handfuls of enemies, and a boss . . . Combat involves kicking, knifing, or tossing grenades as poorly as possible (where is my gun? I'm a CIA agent!). The enemies' movements are erratic, which makes hitting them a crapshoot, and the controls have zero balance; Agent George often skitters across the screen." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"You'll instantly be put off by the slippery, unresponsive controls . . . Once you reach the second level any possible enjoyment the game had vanishes . . . Gun toting enemies are introduced here and they will fire on you relentlessly, so jumping is a necessity. If they corner you on the edge of the screen dodging their fire becomes extremely difficult. Add that the bullet sprites cause screen flicker, making them sometimes invisible . . . I managed to reach the end of the second stage, but holy hell it's unfair. The boss of the second stage is a guy on a camel. This boss jumps and fires volleys of bullets at you that are nearly impossible to dodge . . . For a game released in 1991, its appearance shares more in common with games released around 1986 like *Kid Niki* and *Deadly Towers*. Colors are fairly vivid and some backgrounds are fairly interesting, but for the most part everything lacks polish. Animation is basic, character sprites are clunky and sometimes downright bizarre, and most of the game is overwhelmingly blue and yellow. Sound and music fare worse than the graphics, with a single bland tune that repeats throughout the entire game . . . Sound effects are decent, but below average." —Steemit (steemit.com/gaming)

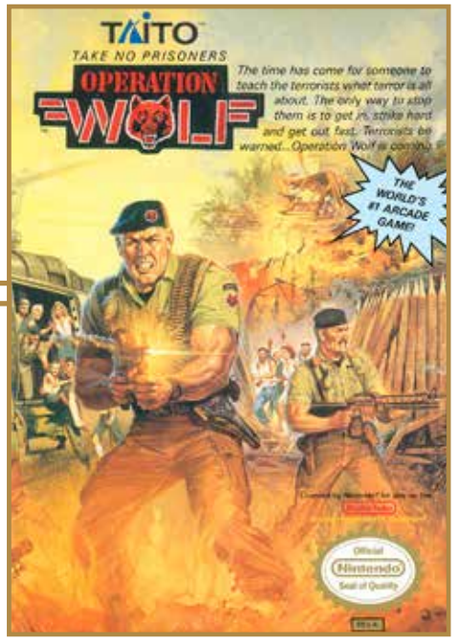




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Operation Wolf

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Daiei Seisakusho.
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



In *Operation Wolf*, you point the Nintendo Zapper at the screen as you fire a machine gun and launch grenades at helicopters, gun boats, armored cars, evil generals, and several types of soldiers, including field, armored, guerilla, knife, and motorcycle. The game supports the standard NES controller as well. You should avoid killing hostages, children, nurses, and prisoners of war. Shooting vultures, pigs, chickens, and magazines grants additional ammo (which you'll definitely need), and you can unleash dynamite to blow up all onscreen enemies. Other items provide reduced levels of injury, extra fire power, and rapid fire. There are four side-scrolling levels of play, each with six missions. After you complete the airport mission the president will give a speech. The tone of his speech—angry, unhappy, happy, or very happy—will depend on how many prisoners you rescued. The manual features a one-page comic strip telling the game's storyline, in which terrorists have seized an American embassy in a South American jungle. Based on Taito's 1987 arcade game, which was equipped with a mounted, positional gun.

Memories: I enjoyed this game in the arcades and was happy with the NES port. I received a boxed copy in a trade at a video game convention a couple years ago and dragged it from show to show, trying to resell it. It just sat there, never moving, with very little interest, so I decided to keep it in my collection. The arcade version of *Operation Wolf* was released on the Xbox and PlayStation 2 as part of *Taito Legends*, but without light gun support. The NES version was released on the Wii Virtual Console, but it also lacked light gun support, so I'm glad to have the cartridge in my collection. For once I'm glad a game I was trying to sell went unsold.

Notable Quotable:
"On its own *Operation Wolf* is a very good shooting game, with nicely detailed scrolling backgrounds, lots of enemy characters, and a good supply of secret power-ups. It doesn't compare to the coin-op, however. The joystick handling is awkward, but it is better than the gun for high scores." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1989)

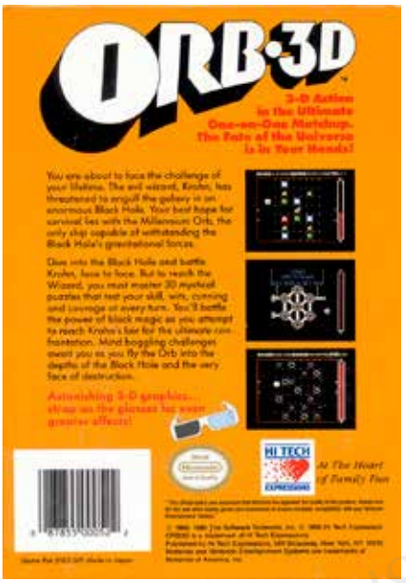
Notable Quotable:
"Contrast between the gunsight and background is less distinctive than it might be in some scenes, which caused us to rate the graphics of the game with one-half star less than the full four stars which it otherwise merits . . . an excellent game of great depth and variety, offering relentless action and stark realism." —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"The action is very slow, with sprites nonchalantly strolling to their death. The graphics, while not completely disastrous, certainly do little to enhance the fast and furious theme of the game. The lack of attention to detail on the backdrops leaves them looking drab, and the stuttering animation makes the whole scene look like an outing of cardboard cut-outs! Using the light gun is certainly preferable to the joypad, which proves fidgety and frustrating, but because the game is visually disappointing things get very tedious all too quickly. I was hoping that at least the sound effects might save some face, but I'm afraid the machine gun sounds like a baby's rattle and the explosions are reminiscent of someone munching on a bag of crisps!" —*Mean Machines* (August 1992)

Scanned Publication

Orb-3D

PUBLISHER: Hi-Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: The Software Toolworks.
GAME TYPE: Ball-and-Paddle/ Action Puzzle; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

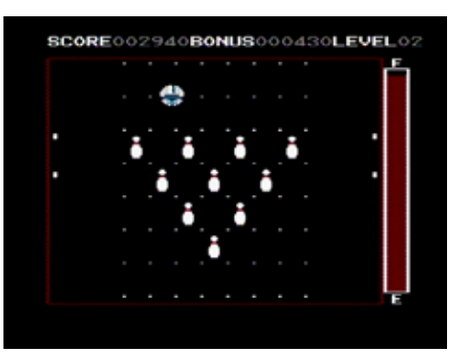


Originally packaged with a cheaply produced pair of 3-D glasses, this entertaining and unusual cartridge is a ball-and-paddle game with puzzles to solve. You control a pair of paddles placed on the left and right sides of a grid-like playfield. As a Millennium Orb spacecraft moves in a spherical pattern back and forth across the screen (giving the game its 3-D visual effect) you must keep it in play by bouncing it off the paddles. If not, the fuel level will deplete, which also acts as a timer. If fuel gets low the player must proceed to the Vern's Orb-O-Rama screen to restock. To hit targets on the screen you must press a button to make the Orb dive into the various objects on the grid. Hitting the targets, usually in a particular order, is how each of the game's 30 "enigma chamber" levels are beaten. Each chamber is a puzzle of sorts, including challenges based on bowling, dice, and tic-tac-toe. Many of the puzzles are straightforward, such as one where you help a worm metamorphose into a butterfly, but a few of them are difficult to figure out, especially in later levels. The blinking eye stage is especially tricky, and some of the stages are even amusing, such as the one where you must hit elephants, mice, and cats in the order of which they fear one another. Music is repetitive so you should probably crank up some other tunes. At its core a one-player, puzzle-enhanced take on *Pong* (you can even put "English" on the ball), *Orb-3D* is a port of the 1989 computer game *Beyond the Black Hole* which boasted 35 levels.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

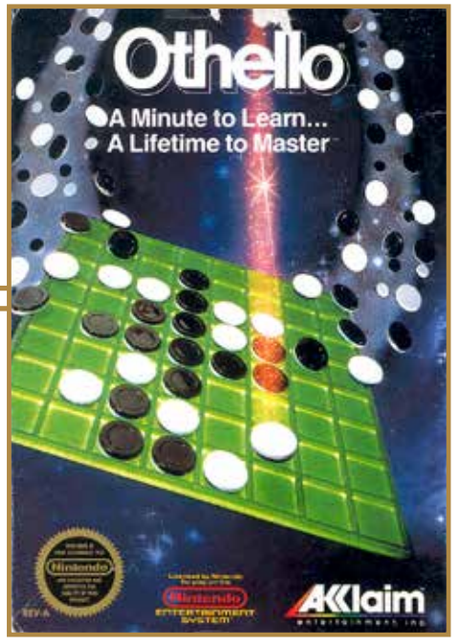
Notable Quotable:

"*Orb-3D* should have been called 'Pong II: Now With Objectives and Stuff' because that's pretty much what it is. There's a story about an evil wizard and black holes, but it just complicates hitting the orb (in miraculous 3D) back and forth between paddles in space . . . Calling the levels 'puzzles' is a stretch, as it's basically just crap to do while you're playing *Pong*. Said crap includes popping bubbles, playing tic-tac-toe, moving numbered squares, and attacking multi-colored animals in the correct order . . . the Orb Refueling Station is a nightmarish sequence that has you attempting to fit the orb into small holes just to refuel. Not only is it hard to fit the orb into the holes, but the holes are only open for a short amount of time. To refuel completely you need to enter at least five of the seven holes, so you need to be an *Orb-3D* champion just to accomplish this minor task . . . But why did Software Toolworks even bother with this refueling portion? Why can't completing the crap in each level slowly add to your fuel tank? *Orb-3D* has clunky controls, bizarre gameplay, and a stupid story." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



Othello

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory.
GAME TYPE: Board Game; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.



A game that some have called "checkers with a twist," *Othello*, which is based on the classic strategy board game, has players taking turns placing round pieces on a green 8×8 grid of squares, trying to trap the other player. When one piece is trapped between two opponent pieces (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) it will turn the other color (one player uses black pieces while the other uses white). The objective of the game is to have more of your color on the board than the other player. Games can be timed (20, 30, or 40 minutes) or played with no clock, and the one-player mode offers four difficulty levels, some of which allow for taking back moves. Unfortunately, unlike certain computer versions, there are no beginner friendly options for showing all possible moves or having the computer suggest moves. The first console game called *Othello* was published in 1980 for the Atari 2600, but an *Othello* clone called *Dynasty!* was released for the Odyssey2 the year before that. *Othello* is patterned after *Reversi*, which was invented way back in 1883.

Memories: In 2017, Arc System Works brought a stripped down but playable version of the *Othello* board game to the Switch. Unlike many other modern board-turned-video games, the Switch version lacks such flourishes as exotic themes, animated characters, and unlockable content. You can't even change the time limit, which you could do on the NES game. Speaking of the NES game (which we should do since this is an NES book), it was programmed by the late Satoru Iwata, who later would become the fourth president of Nintendo.

Notable Quotable:
"This may sound crazy, but I'd rather play the Atari 2600 version of *Othello*. Yes, the NES version looks better, sounds better, and has more options, but I like how the 2600 version played faster, how it continually showed you your current score, and most importantly how the easy difficulty was better suited for my lacking *Othello* skills." —The No Swear Gamer (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"*Othello* gets no style points. Really, any attempts would be cheesy. You'll want to mute the music. The 'GAME END' is an extra twist of the knife after the computer beats you 57 to 7 . . . The game lets you have up to forty minutes to think but it moves instantly. Like the quiet moves that are so strong in the game proper, this is a passive sort of bragging that says enough on its own, part of a fascinatingly simple, even frightening example of how computers can quickly outstrip humans. I don't think I enjoyed my journey toward winning and I don't think I want to go through the pain of relearning the strategy. I would rather just settle for clobbering the Atari version of *Othello*." —Andrew Schultz (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:
"There are several features I've found useful in other computerized versions of *Othello* that I wish Acclaim had also added. First, the number of counters scored by each side is displayed only at the end of the game. It would have been helpful if a running count were available throughout the game so you could quickly see how you are doing. Second, particularly for young players, an option to show all legal moves would make it easier for them to pick their moves and help speed up the game. Finally, at the lower levels (say, 1 and 2), another useful feature would be to have the computer suggest your best move . . . In one player mode *Othello* is extremely tough to beat . . . You may find it's more fun in two-player mode." — *Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: Back in the mid-1990s, my grandmother frequently took me to the farmer's market. She'd give me a couple bucks to get whatever I wanted while she picked up an Amish pie, a bag of licorice, or fresh tomatoes. I got my first pair of Converse sneakers and my first Stephen King book there. One stand had a bunch of video games, comics, Hot Wheels, and action figures. The table was full of NEW PlayStation games, but NES cartridges were banished to a bin underneath, within my price range. There was a buy-one-get-one-free deal so I picked two I always wanted. The guy said he was happy to throw one more in for free and handed me a bag with a big yellow smiley face on it.

I had no idea what *Othello* was, other than in reference to Shakespeare (I'm a librarian and was always a nerd). I figured the guy was desperate to get rid of the game. Turns out my grandmother was actually excited to try it. No matter what anyone tells you it is not as easy as checkers, and she thoroughly trounced me a few times before actually teaching me how to play. We sat on the floor of the attic together, eyes glued to the tiny TV. I loved the way she'd tickle me and say "I got you!" when she trapped my discs. The way she'd look surprised and let her jaw drop, then snap her mouth shut in mock anger when I trapped hers. The beauty of these games is they don't just bring back nostalgia for Nintendo, they open a portal to moments of life you might otherwise forget. Good game, Nana. —Krystle Tiedeman, Librarian, Producer of *The King of Arcades*

Insider Insight: When I was a kid my family loved the board game *Othello*. We had weekly tournaments, but no one ever beat my dad. He was (and still is) a master of the game and knew every move there was. I have fond memories of these family games, but I also fondly recall the NES version. It was one of only two titles my dad would play (*Tetris* was the other), as he didn't really care for video games. *Othello* appealed to my dad as a way to get even better at the real game, and in addition to teaching me to play the board game version, he would teach me the game via the video game adaptation. When I went up against the computer AI he would advise my moves and get me to think on the fly, and I gradually became better because of it.

The cartridge is a well-designed virtual take on *Othello* with nice, memorable music. It may have been a simple conversion of the board game, but it became a great bonding tool for my family, just as much as the board game. I'll probably never be on my father's skill level, but the NES game helped me come close. I may no longer have weekly tournaments with my family, but the memories of my dad teaching my siblings and I how to play *Othello* using the NES game will remain with me forever. When I get nostalgic for my childhood *Othello* is often one of the first games I turn to for a quick round of retro gaming, whether against one of my friends or the computer. Thanks to my dad's training I almost always win. —Jon Balofsky, who has written about video games for such outlets such as Playeressence, Shigeru News, Real Otaku Gamer, and Indie Gamer Team

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Overlord

PUBLISHER: Virgin Games.
DEVELOPER: Probe Software.
GAME TYPE: Real-Time Strategy; 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on the 1990 computer semiclassic, *Overlord* is a complex strategy game that places you in a universe composed of a small grouping of planets, each a lonely sphere waiting to be given life. Working from a single Starbase, you must set out to colonize these barren planets. By pointing and clicking on various icons you can do the following: set up farming stations; mine for minerals; adjust taxation rates on the citizenry to raise money; spy on alien races; build a fleet (with a maximum of 32 ships); purchase an atmosphere processor, a solar satellite, weapons, and other items; monitor economic information; load and unload cargo ships; launch, land, and fuel battle cruisers; attack and colonize planets; transport food, people, fuel, and energy between colonies; fire missiles at planetary shield installations; and much more. The busy screen displays such

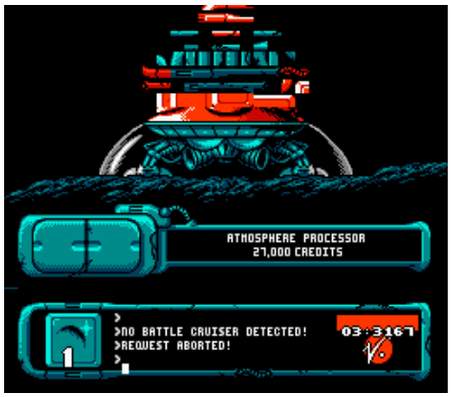
things as running text, outer space, planetary surfaces, and the aforementioned icons. When you get attacked the action switches to a top-down shooter, where you guide a crosshair in combat against the enemy. There are also top-down areas where you guide a hovertank and fire at enemies and their base. According to the storyline you are a general in the Galactic Federation in a war against a tyrant named Rorn.

Notable Quotable:

"*Overlord* is an interesting game. It is a COMPUTER game, though, and most computer ports to the NES are not very exciting. There is a lot to do, and the game is very involving, but all I really found was a bunch of sub-screens filled with click-on icons and a little action that seemed like a glorified *Missile Command*." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1992)

Notable Quotable:

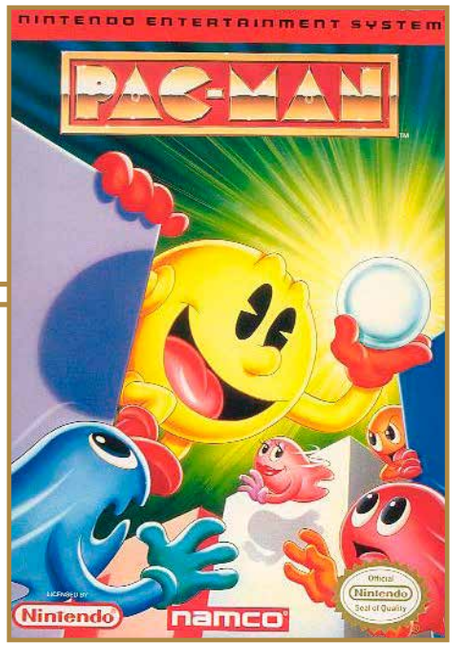
"Some of *Overlord*'s graphic elements are nice, but for most of the game you'll just be staring at menus, icons, and meters . . . With the exception of the title theme there is absolutely no music . . . Games like this aren't meant to give you instant gratification, I know, but I think they should be easily accessible in the beginning and gradually increase in difficulty, especially when you have four different scenarios to conquer. As it is, I'm totally unable to get into this game and play it. It's hard for me to make a recommendation. The only way to play this game is to buy it (the ROM does not work correctly) and it's somewhat rare. If you're really into collecting NES games, or if you really enjoy strategy games, then you may want to pick this up if you find it." —Flying Omelette (www.flyingomelette.com)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pac-Man (Namco)

PUBLISHER: Namco.
DEVELOPER: Namco Hometek.
GAME TYPE: Maze; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1993.



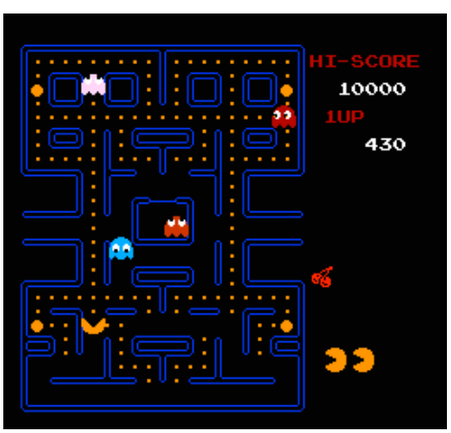
This is an excellent port of Namco's legendary coin-op classic from 1980 that popularized the maze genre, kickstarted Pac-Man Fever, and inspired an avalanche of merchandise. You guide the famous pie-shaped fellow around a maze, munching pellets lining the pathways while avoiding four color-coded ghosts Inky, Blinky, Pinky, and Clyde. By eating one of four power pellets positioned in the corners of the maze Pac-Man will become energized, letting you temporarily turn the tables on the ghosts and chase after them. Gobbling ghosts grants progressively higher points, and a gobbled ghost will return to its home in the middle of the maze, only to return shortly thereafter. A piece of fruit appears twice in each maze and you can gobble it down for extra points. Fruit gets progressively more valuable with each maze. If you escape through one of the two warp tunnels (one on the left, one on the right) you'll exit out to the other side of the maze. Once you clear a maze of standard pellets you'll begin the maze anew. As with so many classic arcade games the same nonscrolling screen keeps repeating, but becomes progressively more difficult. This version of the game is much harder to find than the unauthorized yet identical Tengen release which came out half a decade prior.

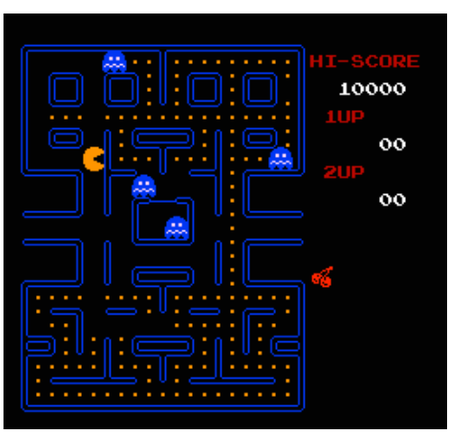
Notable Quotable:

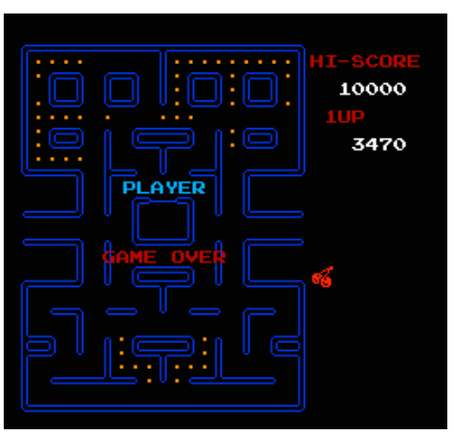
"*Pac-Man*—while inherently repetitive—always delivers as a fun and rewarding gaming experience. However, this comes with one caveat: paradoxically, because of its very success, there are so many versions and opportunities to play it since its release that opting for the old NES version may not be the most prudent purchase . . . a truly respectable and accurate port of the original." —Mark Birnbaum (www.ign.com), reviewing the NES game downloaded to the Wii

Notable Quotable:

"Visually and sonically this isn't going to turn heads. The arcade original is tremendously basic, but it could be argued that is part of its charm. Although the NES isn't exactly a powerhouse in technological terms, this is a fairly faithful port of the coin-op original, so fans will notice pretty much everything is as it should be. Regardless of its shortcomings, *Pac-Man* is one of those games that remains timeless . . . the gameplay remains as addictive as ever. *Pac-Man* is from an era where the challenge of a video game was all about scoring as many points as possible, and even today this has a certain appeal to it." —Damien McFerran (www.nintendolife.com), reviewing the NES game downloaded to the Wii



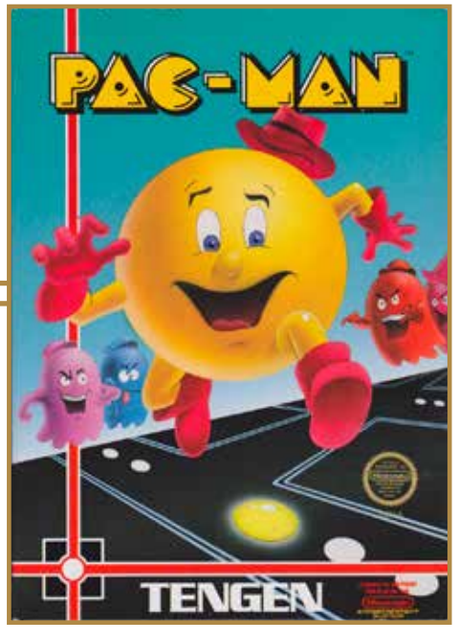


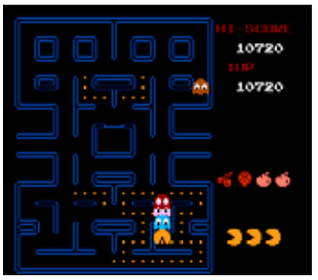


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pac-Man (Tengen)

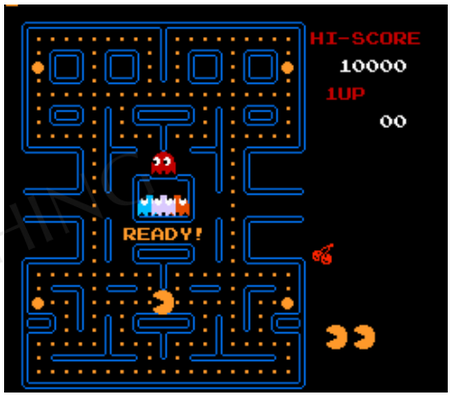
PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Namco Hometek.
GAME TYPE: Maze; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1988.





Years before the authorized, Namco-published release of *Pac-Man* for the NES hit store shelves, Tengen produced this unauthorized version. The two ports are graphically identical and play the same. Of course the packaging is different, most notably the back of the Tengen box listing the ghosts' nicknames. In the Namco version the ghosts are also unnamed in the manual. Of course, the Tengen box and cart lack the Nintendo Seal of Approval. The Tengen version of *Ms. Pac-Man* for the NES introduced a variety of unorthodox features to shake up the dot-munching gameplay, such as crazy mazes, crazy speeds, and scrolling screens, but that's not the case with *Pac-Man*. For you collectors, the Tengen version is much easier to find than its Namco counterpart. This is because the Namco game was produced late in the life of the NES.

Memories: When I was in junior high in 1981, the *Pac-Man* arcade game appeared at a convenience store near my school. I would ride my bike to the store before and after school to play it, *Phoenix*, and *Asteroids*. Back in those days virtually every convenience store, bar, pool hall, restaurant, and even places like Walmart and K-Mart had coin-op games, and you could usually find a *Pac-Man* when there were several machines. When Pac-Man Fever hit during this era I barely paid attention to all the merchandise the game spawned, though I did enjoy playing the Atari 2600 port, despite its many flaws. I was happy when the Atari 5200 version largely corrected these flaws, but it had a whole new problem: the noncentering 5200 controller. Luckily the NES port is just about perfect, especially when played with an NES Advantage joystick, which offers tighter, more arcade-like control than the d-pad.



Notable Quotable:

"Learning the *Pac-Man* patterns was a mark of the true game player. If there are patterns here, they aren't the same as in the arcade version or as readily apparent . . . responsiveness to the control pad isn't what it might be. Many times you'll find yourself vainly trying to turn a corner while Pac-Man insists on going straight . . . *Pac-Man* will be more of interest to the older players who were around in the early days of the video arcades." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"The timing feels the same . . . The sound is duplicated perfectly . . . There's not a single touch-up, but that's exactly how we want it. About the only complaint I have is that it feels at times like the controls aren't quite as responsive as they should be. It took me a life or two getting used to the fact that you need to press the button at just the right moment when you come to a turn or Pac-Man may head right past that fork in the road and into the waiting arms of a ghost." —Jason Venter (www.honestgamers.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pac-Mania

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Westwood Studios.
GAME TYPE: Maze; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1990.

A nice port of Namco's thoroughly entertaining but underrated arcade game from 1987, *Pac-Mania* shakes up the maze genre in fine fashion. You guide the pie-shaped icon around mazes, gobbling dots while avoiding ghosts, but there are some interesting new additions to the *Pac-Man* formula, including pseudo-3-D graphics, scrolling playfields (meaning you can't see the entire maze at once, which some won't like), a pair of new ghosts named Funky and Spunky, and, most importantly, the ability for Pac-Man to jump over enemies. In later stages the ghosts can jump as well, but, as usual, you can eat power pellets that let you temporarily gobble the ghosts. Purple ghost Sue from *Ms. Pac-Man* is here as well. In addition, there are two new power pills: green, which provides a temporary speed boost; and red, which gives double points. The game sports an isometric perspective and themed mazes—Block Town, Pac-Man's Park, Sandbox Land, and Jungly Steps—further separating it from its roots. The clapping and cheering sounds from the original game have been removed and the graphics aren't quite as polished (an understandable difference), but these are small gripes. There's even a new feature: the ability to level select. Unlicensed and less common than you might think.

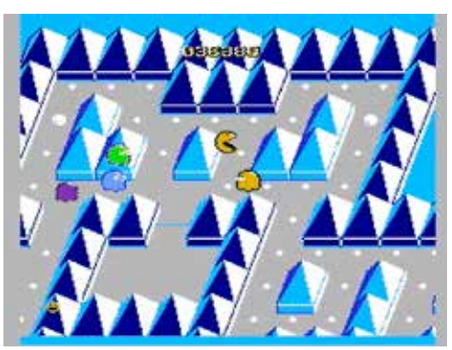
Memories: I thoroughly enjoy many of the *Pac-Man* sequels, including *Super Pac-Man*, *Baby Pac-Man* (the *Pac-Man*/pinball hybrid), and, yes, *Pac-Mania*. The first time I ever played it I didn't know you could jump, so I thought it was a really difficult game. It got much easier when I figured out after a couple of plays that you could indeed leap over the ghosts.

Notable Quotable:

"Graphically *Pac-Mania* is one of Tengen's most appealing games. The colors are bright and the illustrations are sharp . . . If you're a fan of the little yellow ghost gobbler you'll be pleased to add this one to your game library." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Feels like a logical 3D extension of the original *Pac-Man* formula . . . Since the mazes are more sprawling, the game feels slower because you have a lot of ground to cover . . . There are nine ghosts (!) in each stage, but they seem less tenacious than the four in the original *Pac-Man* . . . The game has happy-go-lucky music in the tradition of the series, but the intermissions aren't particularly memorable. That's the problem with the game in general. Despite all the extra bells and whistles, I'd be just as happy to play the original *Pac-Man* instead." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)



Insider Insight: The first time I saw *Pac-Mania* in the arcades I was transfixed. From the gorgeous cabinet art to the cute, colorful graphics, there was instant appeal. It was based on one of the all-time classic video games, but in 3D! Since it was an upgrade of an existing concept you didn't have to learn to play; as soon as you dropped a coin you knew exactly what to do.

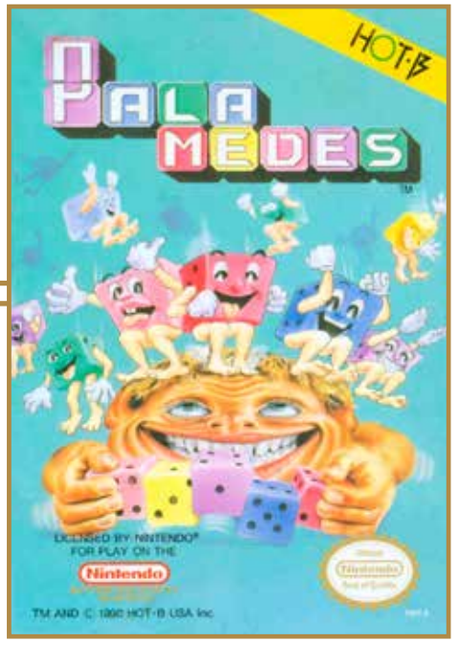
The success of the game meant that numerous home versions followed, including this sterling port from Tengen, which was the home label of arcade company Atari Games, created purely to get around an agreement of the split that said the coin-op company couldn't publish home releases under the Atari name. Since Atari Games was the distributor of Namco's *Pac-Mania* in the west you'd expect this version to be authentic, right? And for the most part it is. The isometric perspective was changed slightly to better suit the NES's TV display, but otherwise it's very close.

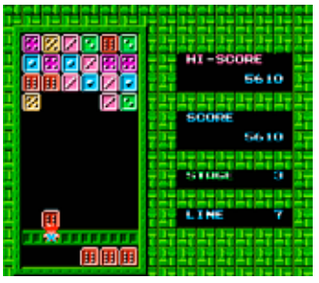
I was delighted to write an "Ultimate Guide" for *Pac-Mania* for issue 179 of *Retro Gamer* magazine back in 2018. Said article was picked for the front cover, which was a big achievement for a freelancer. As part of the piece I played through every version of the game (no less than 16!) and discovered that the NES port more than holds its own. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for more than 15 years

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Palamedes

PUBLISHER: Hot-B.
DEVELOPER: Natsume.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



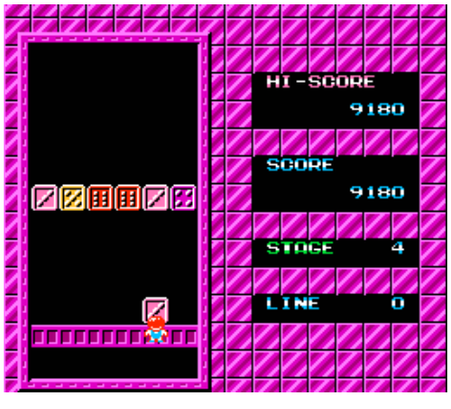


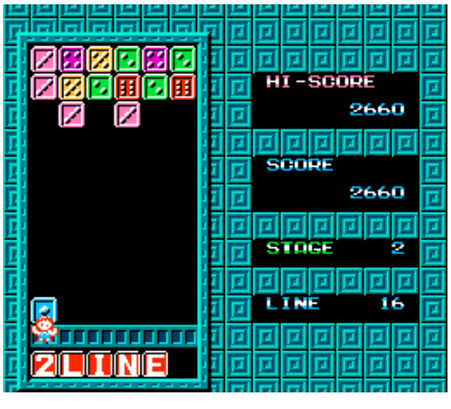
Palamedes borrows elements of play from *Tetris*, *Space Invaders*, dominoes, and poker. As rows of color-coded dice descend from the top of the screen, players, guiding a little guy who runs back and forth along the bottom of the playfield, must make them disappear by shooting them. The little guy's ammo is a die, and the player can cycle through the colors/numbers on that die at any time. For a descending die to disappear, players must shoot it with a die of the same color/number. When you eliminate a die from the playfield, it will appear in a row under the guy you control. By eliminating dice in a particular order (1–6, for example), essentially creating a poker hand, players can make entire rows of dice disappear. Like its coin-op counterpart (Taito, 1990), *Palamedes* for the NES offers two-player split screen action. However, the arcade game has more realistic looking dice. Both offer strategic fun and both are obscure. Some of the instructions for the game are on the cartridge label, interestingly enough, and the box art is decidedly strange (and a bit disturbing).

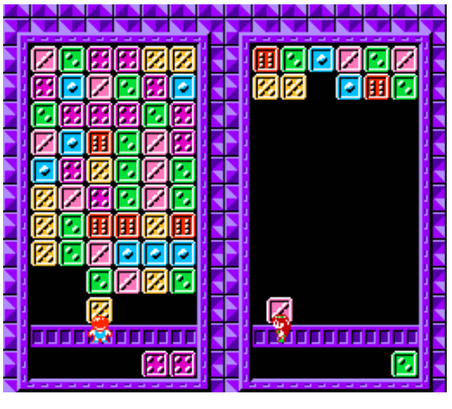
Notable Quotable:
"*Palamedes* is a different type of puzzle game that involves as much eye-hand coordination as it does thinking skills. One-on-one play is the best, but it stands well on its own. It's not in the same class as *Tetris*, but *Palamedes* isn't bad at all . . . Good tunes . . . a tournament mode makes the game challenging." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"There are plenty of suggestions for what might make its ideas more engaging, but it's more likely that its design would need an overhaul to escape its average execution. Whether it be the bottom bar in general, the generosity of line clears, or the way dice are presented to the player, something needs major retooling to inject the energy and difficulty a matching based puzzler needs to keep the player engaged." —The Game Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

Insider Insight: Dice? Sure. Cute characters? Why not? Terrifying box art? Absolutely! I don't know who came up with the concept of playing poker with dice in an action puzzle format, but man, it works great! The single player mode here is good fun, as are the multiplayer and tournament modes. Tensions can run pretty high in this one, as it can be easy to become overwhelmed by the influx of dice your opponent can send your way. After all, it's crush or be crushed. I didn't even know you could beat this game as a kid. It wasn't until revisiting it as an adult and hearing the music change on the 20th level that I had even considered it could be beaten. Needless to say, my inner child was pretty happy that day. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality



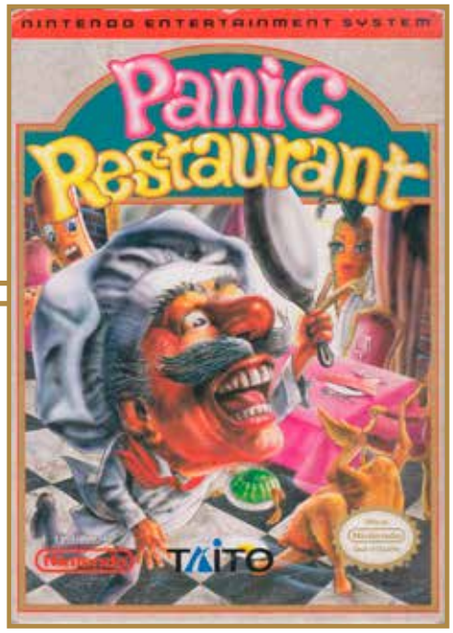




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Panic Restaurant

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Disco/EIM.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



Mutant food has taken over Eaten Restaurant. As a white-haired, mustachioed chef named Cookie, you must run, jump, duck, and climb through six pastel-colored, obstacle-ridden levels of play: Garden, Dining Room, Kitchen (watch out for gas burners and boiling pots of water), Courtyard, Freezer (beware of slippery floors and icicle spears), and Basement, where he must take on the Mad Chef. To battle the pizzas, hot dogs, chicken legs, toast, onions, apples, mad carrots, shish kabobs, and other food-themed enemies, including bosses, Cookie's standard weapon is a frying pan, but he can pick up a large spoon (which has a long reach), Frisbee-like plates, eggs (for throwing), a cooking pot (which he wears on his head for temporary invincibility), and a pogo stick–like fork. Other items to grab include candy—for health, ironically enough—and coins for use in bonus stage slot machines. In addition to slots there are two other mini-games: Go Fish, where you extend a hand to catch flying fish (avoid the black fish); and Fried Eggs, where you guide a frying pan along the bottom of the screen, catching white eggs (avoid the black eggs). Charming, cartoonlike, and highly enjoyable, *Panic Restaurant* is a lot of fun but very hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

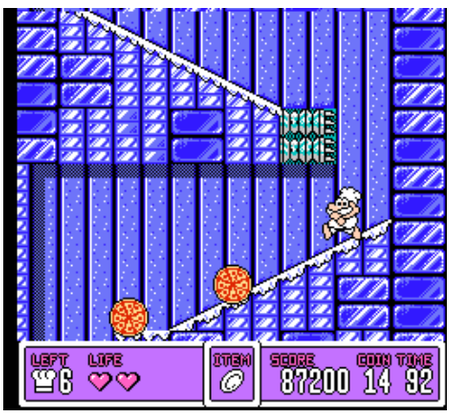
"It's got a great art style with a lot of character. The sprites are big, nicely drawn, and well-animated for an 8-bit game. The difficulty level is appropriate—just tough enough to keep you interested. The variety of weapons (all various kitchen utensils) livened things up as well. It is rather short . . . if that doesn't keep you away the price probably will." —Destructoid (www.destructoid.com)

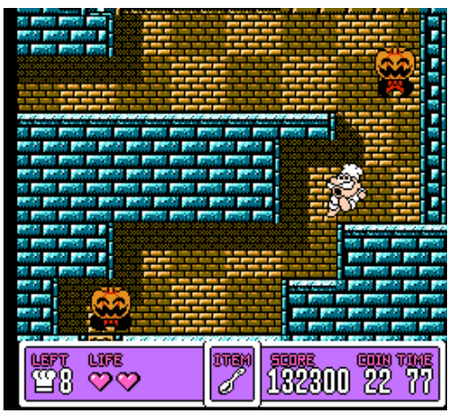
Notable Quotable:

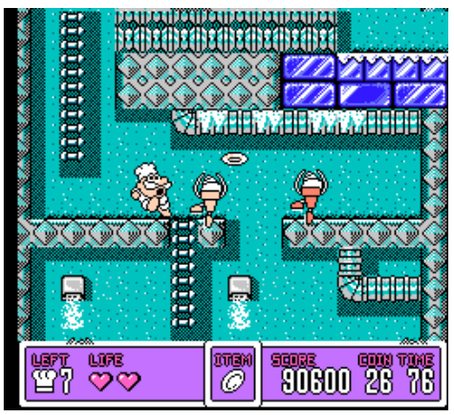
"*Panic Restaurant* is a game I'm sure I passed over at Blockbuster Video and the flea market due to its ghastly cover. As a late 1992 release it received very little coverage; I only remember *Nintendo Power* giving it the time of day . . . differs slightly from its Japanese counterpart with a redesigned protagonist. In its Asian incarnation, Kokkun is a young chef who attacks with a mean head butt. For its American debut he was redesigned and now looks like the love child of the KFC Colonel and the Chef Boyardee, uh, chef. The change had to be deliberate, but has very little impact on the gameplay. The game was made easier by having fewer enemies and more power-ups. We definitely won out in this regard." —Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The level design is quite cool. Simplistic, sure. But unless you give some serious thought to why a chef would have a huge vat of grease in the middle of his kitchen, one he can't safely cross without hopping from bubble to bubble, you'll find the whole thing quite charming . . . Your chef looks like a happy little fellow . . . he's well-animated. Though you won't like dying, it's almost worth it to see the way he falls flat on his back and convulses. And the personality each piece of food has is a definite selling point . . . You get six stages, and playing through them doesn't take long . . . It's charming, it's fun, and you can use it to fill that half hour before work." —Jason Venter (www.honestgamers.com)







©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Paperboy

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Tengen.
GAME TYPE: Mission-Based Racing; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1988.

Rise and shine, sleepy head—it's time to begin your paper route. You ride a bicycle up a narrow pathway consisting primarily of a sidewalk and the left side of the road, throwing newspapers at houses lining the left side of the screen. Hitting the windows of non-subscribers nets points, as does hitting the porches and paper boxes of subscribers. There are other targets as well, such as bushes, tombstones, and garbage cans, but numerous obstacles, including motorcycles, tornados, breakdancers, dogs, and cars, make it challenging to do your job. Aiming is tough, due in part to the game's isometric perspective. Gameplay is fine, but *Paperboy* is a disappointment visually, especially when compared to the more colorful, more detailed, more faithfully adapted Master System version. The NES game does add a two-player mode, but it lacks the trio of difficulty levels found in the Master System port and in Atari's original 1984 arcade game, which stood out thanks to amusing voice effects, unusual gameplay, and, radically enough, a handlebars controller.

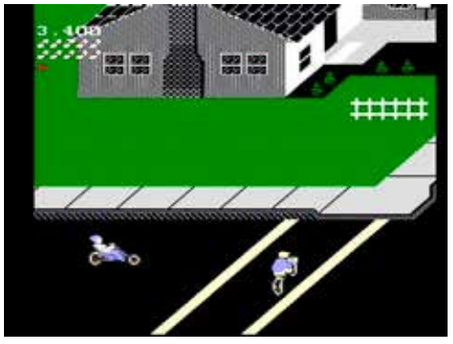
Memories: When *Paperboy* was new in the arcades it was quite the sensation. It seemed as though there was always someone playing the game and a crowd was almost always gathered around to watch. Gamers found *Paperboy* unique, challenging, humorous, and irreverent. I wasn't the biggest fan, but I did enjoy it to some degree. I primarily remember playing it at the now-defunct ShowBiz Pizza, back when they sold beer and had cool coin-op games.

Notable Quotable:

"*Paperboy* is unlike anything else on the market. Although it seems tame, it requires dexterity to master. The only drawback: there isn't anything really spectacular to look at as you play (even the Grim Reaper is bland), though the sound effects are exceptional!" —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"I like *Paperboy* in the arcades, but this ghastly excuse of a conversion is nothing like Atari's classic coin-op. Horrible, tasteless colors and lousy sprites make the game ugly to look at, and the booming tunes and feeble effects are a sick mockery of their arcade counterparts. This could be forgiven if the gameplay was enjoyable, but sadly it's lacking in that department too. A few games are what it takes to get completely annoyed by the slug-like controls and hopeless collision detection, and after that it's time to put paperboy into early retirement." —*Mean Machines* (March 1991)



Insider Insight: I first played *Paperboy* in 1986, in a surprisingly robust arcade in the middle of a lousy campsite in New Jersey. The arcade cabinet grabbed my attention because of the bicycle handlebars controller. I fell in love with the colorful graphics and over-the-top characters terrorizing the paperboy. When the game hit the NES I begged my dad for it, but we didn't have the money, so we rented it. I played it for hours the next day while my dad was at work, and when he returned home he asked if he could give it a go.

This is where my fun day turned to dread. My dad was strict about not letting my friends in the house while he was at work and breaking this rule meant a major grounding. When he saw all the initials on the "High Scores" screen his face turned red and his temples started twitching. He demanded to know who had been in his house. I told him those initials most likely belonged to the makers of the game but he didn't believe me. I had to turn off the console and then back on again to prove to him that the initials were built in. He was satisfied with that. Thankfully he didn't notice that my friend BJ's initials were on the screen before I reset the console or there would have been hell to pay. —Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Paperboy 2

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Tengen.
GAME TYPE: Mission-Based Racing; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1992.

The Daily Sun

Mindscape Presents

PAPERBOY 2

COPYRIGHT 1991 TENGEN
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
LICENSED BY NINTENDO

A game that was *not* released in the arcades, *Paperboy 2* is the console sequel to the arcade classic *Paperboy* that Atari released in 1984. It features similar gameplay (ride a bicycle up the street on an isometric playfield, throwing newspapers at targets), but adds new obstacles, including gargoyles, ghosts, and sewer monsters. Other additions include new types of houses (mansions, haunted houses, and kids' clubhouses), the choice to play as a female cyclist (girl power!), and, most importantly, obstacles and houses on both sides of the road. As in the original *Paperboy* levels are set up like days of the week, with each level ending in a bonus round. There are now three weeks of stages as opposed to one. If the player misses hitting the porch or paper box of a subscriber's house, that house becomes a nonsubscriber. If the player hits every subscriber house in a level a former subscriber will resubscribe. Hitting nonsubscribers' windows, runaway baby carriages, burglars, and other such targets nets extra points. Once again, picking up bundles of newspapers along the way for extra ammo is important because you can run out.

Notable Quotable:

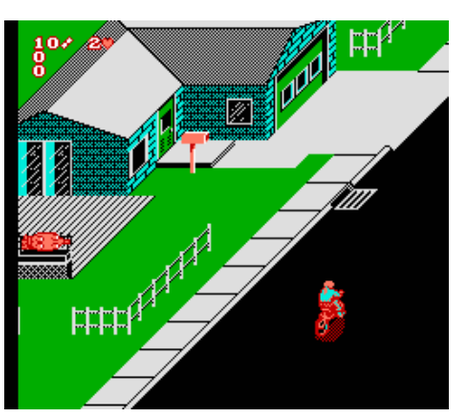
"*Paperboy 2* is a total waste of time. I can't understand why the arcade machine [the original *Paperboy*] was so popular in the first place. Stay clear of this at all costs!" —*N-Force* (September 1992)

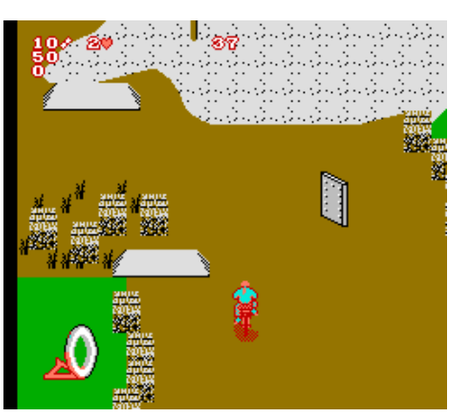
Notable Quotable:

"If *Paperboy* was John Candy then its sequel is Chris Farley. The colors are gaudy, they clash ridiculously with even themselves, and yet somehow they look bland and unremarkable unless they're throwing themselves in your face. The cartoony look from the first title is mostly gone, yet the NES can't really handle the new visual direction . . . Yet for all of its flaws, *Paperboy 2* remains an enjoyable niche title . . . Just don't expect to be playing an undiscovered NES gem." —Jason Venter (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The environment is very interactive . . . Some moments are genuinely funny, such as when you splash water over the sunbather or when you hit the hog roast and it springs back to life! I also liked that your actions in each round are represented in the news headlines . . . There is a bit of slowdown in the game but the graphics are much improved from the original . . . isn't the deepest game in the world, but the additions are welcome (especially the three different routes) as they enhance replayability. The challenge is much fairer, and overall it's simply a more fun experience with good gameplay, a brilliant sense of humor, and many laugh-out-loud moments." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

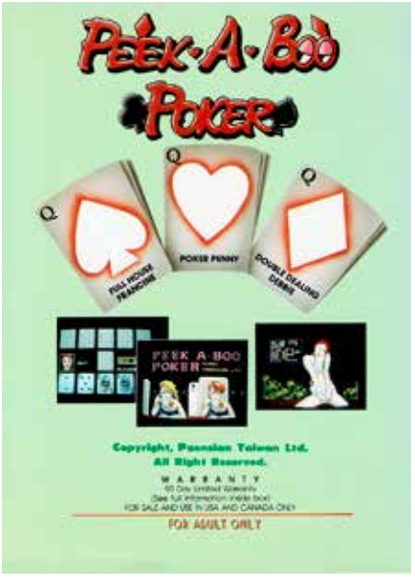


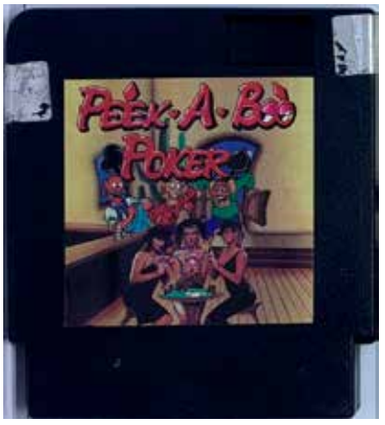


©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Peek-A-Boo Poker

PUBLISHER: Panesian.
DEVELOPER: Hacker International.
GAME TYPE: Gambling; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.





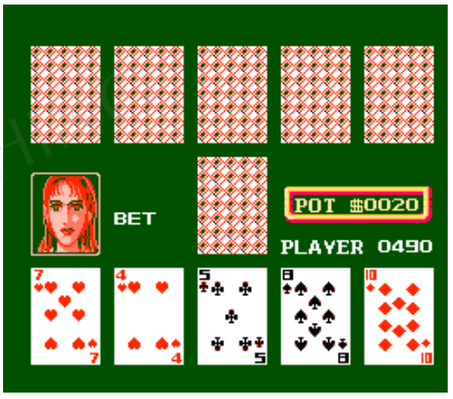
Want to see 8-bit boobies (and other naughty bits) on your TV screen? Then this is your game. *Peek-A-Boo Poker* is one of three adult titles produced by Panesian for the NES, the others being *Hot Slots* and *Bubble Bath Babes*. It is a poorly programmed strip poker simulator that lets you play against one of three different loose ladies: Full House Francine, Pok-er Penny, or Double Dealing Debbie. The game follows standard five-card draw poker rules. For every $1,000 the player wins (up to $5,000) a picture of the girl in question appears on screen, each time more scantily clad, meaning there is nudity in the game. The girls, who appear in a variety of alluring positions, also say (via text) such come-ons as "Hi, I'm Full-House Francine, are you feeling lucky tonight? Wanna fill up my house?" Way to keep it classy, people! Unlicensed and very hard to find.

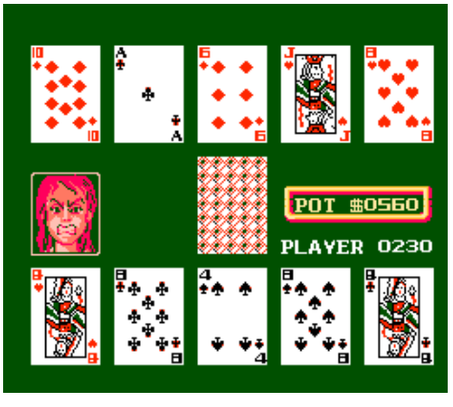
Notable Quotable:

"I played poker for a little while, lost some money. Full-House Francine laughed at my inexperience every time I lost. The whole affair was pretty boring, actually; if I wanted to play poker I'd play with friends or online . . . didn't want to see any nudity . . . I'm not their target demographic and I hope you, the reader, aren't either." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"A lame, slow-paced version of strip poker . . . The opportunity to see 8-bit renditions of nude women is an absurd incentive to keep playing, even if it is a rarity on the NES, and there are certainly better strip poker games available for those seeking such entertainment. *Peek-A-Boo Poker* might have value as a collector's item, but it's not a game that anyone would actually want to play." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

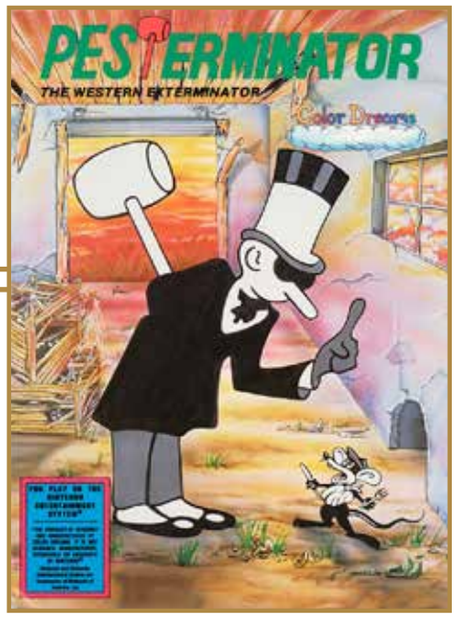


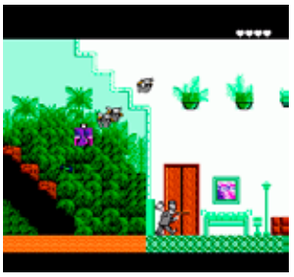


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pesterminator: The Western Exterminator

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams.
DEVELOPER: Color Dreams.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

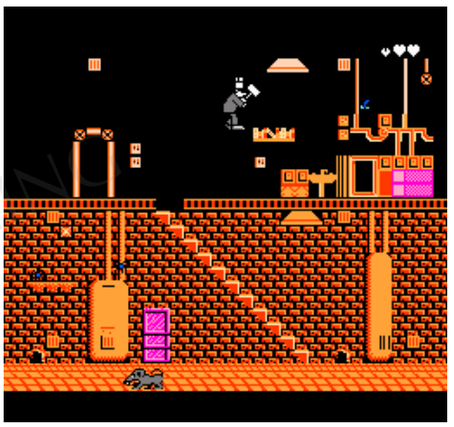


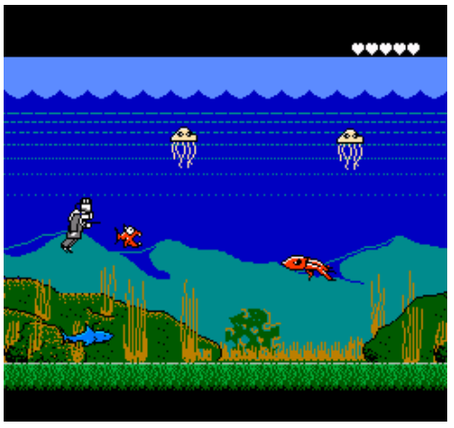


Despite being an unlicensed game, *Pesterminator* stars a licensed character: Kernel Kleanup, who is the black-and-white, top-hat-wearing mascot for the Western Exterminator Company. You guide the slow, poorly animated Kernel across the interconnected floors and up and down the stairs of such two-story constructs as a house, a hotel, and a warehouse, bashing badly drawn bees, beetles, spiders, flies, mice, and other creatures with a large mallet to complete the area. Sometimes you'll search pretty much the entire stage to find all the enemies. Kernel can also enter doors and ride elevators to access the rooms and he can jump over the creatures. Some of the enemy critters crawl while others fly. Mixing up the action is a pair of side-scrolling shooter levels where you pilot a helicopter and swim in the sea. Bosses to battle include Nestor The Egg Pod, Columbian Stinger, and Blue Shark, among others. The back of the box for this hard-to-find game promises nine levels, but there are only eight: House Cleaning, Hotel Eradication, Warehouse Fumigation, Mansion Mayhem, Swamp Gas Cleanup, Warehouse Blow Out, Deep Sea Danger, and The Final Conflict, where you take on Ronnie the Super Rat and his powerful Pest Beam.

Notable Quotable:
"This game is really dreadful . . . looks really ugly and cheap . . . Levels 1 and 4 are merely palette-swapped versions of each other. The same goes for levels 3 and 6 . . . crudely rendered . . . The controls are just as bad as the graphics . . . Like any pest, it should be swatted out of existence." —filmnstuff (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"Weak storyline . . . the graphics are atrocious. Bees look like hummingbirds. Rats appear to be feline in nature . . . the background textures will sometimes flash while the screen scrolls, causing eyestrain. Animation is sparse, with the same animation for the K-man walking as jumping, going up stairs, or sliding across a slippery floor. Animation for enemies merely consists of the sprite moving around the screen, sometimes flickering for a buzzing effect . . . The music harkens back to the days of the Atari 2600 and falls extremely short when compared to the majority of NES titles; a large chunk of sound effects are static-like explosions, such as when you swing your mallet, or high-pitched electronic zaps when you pause the game . . . The background music is a single tune, approximately 30 seconds in length, looped over and over throughout each level and resembles a five-year-old banging out a tune on a Casio keyboard with their nose." —Geoffrey Douglas Smith (formerly at allgame.com)

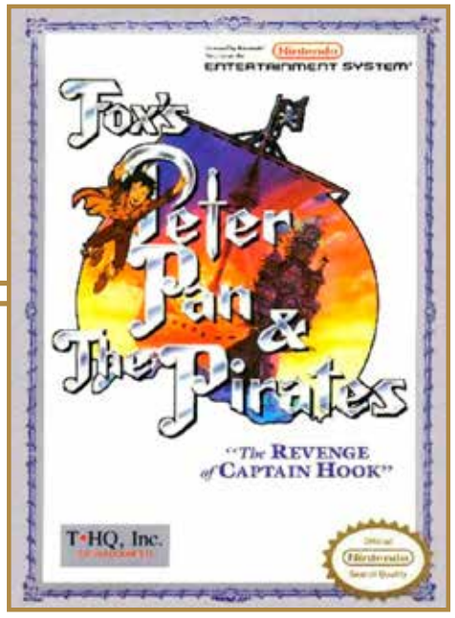




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Peter Pan and the Pirates

PUBLISHER: THQ.
DEVELOPER: Equilibrium.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



Peter Pan and the Pirates is loosely based on the animated television series that ran on Fox from 1990 to 1991 for a total of 65 episodes. As Peter Pan, you run, jump, and fly (as long as you have flight energy from eating food) through Neverland, the "magical island where dreams come true and children never get old." You can duck as well. The objective is to rid Neverland of pirates (a level is not complete until all the pirates have been defeated), including the wicked Captain Hook, who must be forced to walk his own gangplank in the final stage. To battle bad guys you are armed with a lame, short-range sword, requiring you to get close to enemies to stab them or knock them off a ledge. You can also wield a musket, and you can tap cannonballs with your weapon to send them bowling over pirates. You score points by grabbing treasure, rescuing Tinkerbell, killing pirates (more points for knocking them off a ledge than stabbing them), killing Bumper, and finishing a level (more points for finishing a level with all the treasure). On each level there's a treasure chest guarded by a trap. If you take this treasure a heavy cage will fall on you, putting you at the mercy of the pirates for a few seconds.

Notable Quotable:

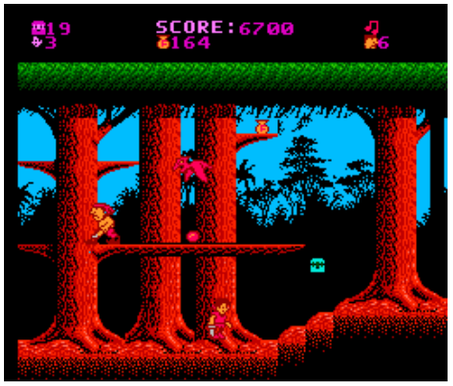
"Follows its cartoon license as much as you could expect it to . . . It looks and controls a lot like the *Back to the Future* NES titles, which can't possibly be considered a good thing. The graphics are mostly shady and gloomy, as though someone ran the game through Photoshop, lowering the contrast and upping the darkness . . . You can jump and move just fine, but for some reason you can only use your sword while Peter Pan is standing completely still . . . a fairly solid side-scroller with questionable graphics and controls." —Paul Franzen (gamecola.net)

Notable Quotable:

"A standard platformer . . . the simplest pitfall can result in disaster . . . there's something strange about Peter's jump. He leaps high but struggles to close gaps. Because of this you will plummet to your death a lot . . . You can't just fly through the stage, heedless of all obstacles. You actually have to pace your flying ability and use your judgment on different scenes to know whether using it is appropriate or not. Just the same, it still demeans most of the jumps in the game . . . There are no fancy moves or tricks to killing your opponents. Most of them pace back and forth, awaiting their bloody fate . . . I get the feeling that the developers never really cared about *Peter Pan and the Pirates*, much in the same way my friends and I never really cared about the show. It shows in almost every aspect of the design. It's a platformer with dull, challenge-free level designs." — Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"There is a very small number of unique enemies in this game. But don't worry! They compensated by making it so if you kill any flying enemy and then move more than two millimeters to the left or right, the enemy will respawn right off the side of the screen and dive at you again to continue its never-ending quest to peck your face off. The actual pirates don't respawn, but just so they didn't feel left out by not being as obnoxious as the other enemies, they decided you shouldn't be allowed to finish a level unless you've killed every single pirate . . . Peter hates landing on the edges of platforms. He prefers to inexplicably fall right through and get eaten by an alligator . . . Each of the game's levels feature about a dozen chronically depressed pirates moping around, sullenly pondering why no one cared enough to give them any AI. All they do is walk back and forth Koopa-style, and then, when you get right up next to them, they try to stab you." —Taylor Bell (www.somethingawful.com)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Phantom Fighter

PUBLISHER: FCI.
DEVELOPER: Marionette.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

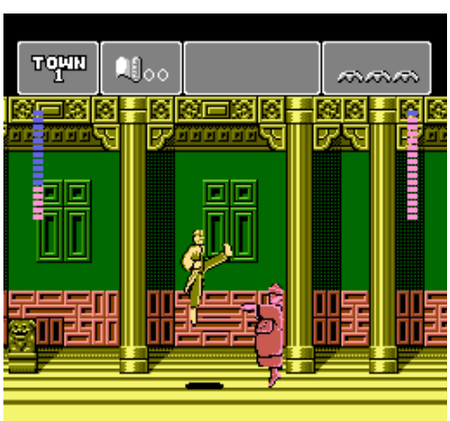
Phantom Fighter casts you in the role of Kenchi, a Chinese martial arts expert who must travel to eight villages to get rid of Kyonshi phantoms who hop around and attack. The Kyonshis have a variety of skills. Some appear frequently but aren't very strong. Some are tall and attack with high jump kicks. Some are small and quick, but have little stamina. As you enter a location in one of the villages a Kyonshi will attack, prompting you to dodge, punch, and kick the creature. After you defeat one a door will open and another will appear. When you have defeated all the Kyonshis in one area the last door will open and the villagers will give you info and items, including such weapons as a sacred sword, a mirror (mesmerizes enemies), or a talisman (freezes enemies). As you progress through the game you'll give scrolls you acquire to kung fu masters, who will arm you with such advanced martial arts skills as jump kicks, windmill jumps, crouch walking, better punches, and the ability to run faster.

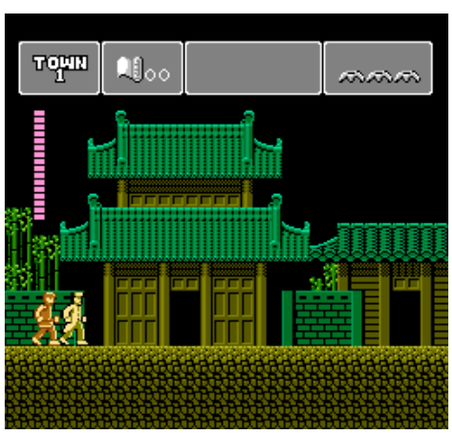
Notable Quotable:
"We enjoyed playing *Phantom Fighter* because it has a different look and feel from the more typical martial arts adventures. The animation of the characters in fighting sequences is quite realistic and we really like the adventure elements that make this much more than a physical contest." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"*Phantom Fighter* is not an incredibly intense game, but it does a good job of taking your typical kung-fu action game one step farther by adding graphic/text screens, scrolling playfields, and very well-animated fighting techniques. Nothing new, but a proven thing has been enhanced." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Martial arts and monsters aren't often mixed in comic books, television, or movies, even though the combination is a pretty cool concept. If you don't believe the idea has potential watch *Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* starring Peter Cushing when it comes on the late show or play *Phantom Fighter*." —*Nintendo Power* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Repetitive, boring enemies . . . gameplay is pretty smooth. It can be tricky trying to figure out just where to stand so as to kick the zombie without them nailing you back. Also your moves are annoyingly limited at the beginning. For instance, walking while ducking is a move learned later on . . . Learning new moves is definitely the coolest part of the game . . . I don't exactly recommend this game, but I don't hate it either." —Nintendo Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

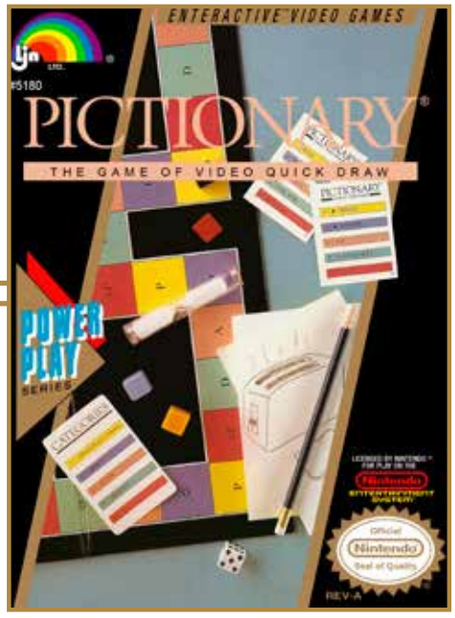


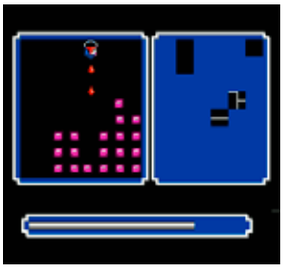


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pictionary: The Game of Video Quick Draw

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Board Game; 1 or more players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.





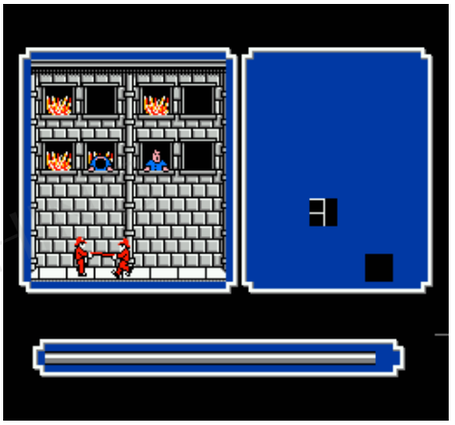
Based on the drawing/board game, *Pictionary* takes advantage of the video format by incorporating skill-based mini-games. When play begins, a die is rolled and the player's piece is advanced on the board. Then the team plays one of four mini-games: Attack of the Paint Zombies (upside down *Space Invaders*); The Warehouse Shuffle (move and stack crates); Four Alarm Rescue (similar to *Circus Atari*—use a trampoline to save babies falling from a burning building); and Leapin' Energy Capsules! (jump on platforms to catch energy balls). The better the player does the more the picture on the right side of the screen will be uncovered (one square at a time). After time runs out the team must type in the correct answer of what the picture is supposed to be. If you're playing with more than one person per team, one player uses the control pad to draw while that player's team guesses what is being drawn. This is more like the actual board game, but clunky drawing controls and the necessity for players to close their eyes or look away when a word is being given make this an awkward process.

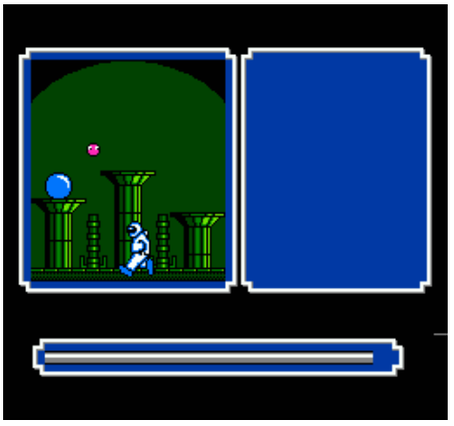
Notable Quotable:

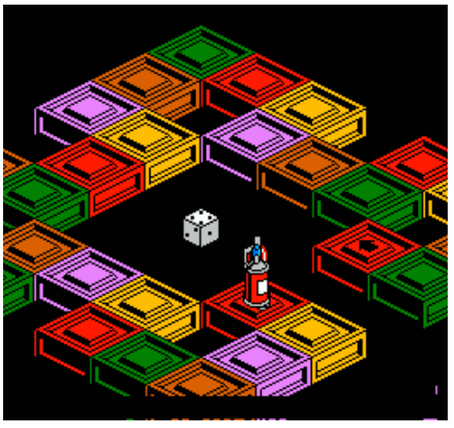
"When you reveal a piece of a picture it's completely random which piece it is. What's worse, in many cases the drawing in question only takes up a portion of the frame, with the remainder consisting of pitch blackness . . . typing the answer is unpolished . . . You control a pair of shoes who walk across the alphabet, with the controls being way too sensitive. It's annoyingly slippery to control . . . if you fail to guess the correct answer, said answer is never revealed, leaving you to ponder at its identity for all eternity . . . A curious time-waster from a bygone era of gaming. Just stick with the board game." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Due to the low-quality graphics LJN had to resort to somewhat 'interpretive' renditions when it came to the picture department. There are many cases when you reveal the entire picture and still can't hazard a guess as to what you're looking at. In these cases I like to run down the clock by typing in various dirty words and seeing what kind of profanity will and will not be accepted into the game as a possible answer. It beats the heck out of spending a few seconds of your life staring at a badly drawn picture trying to tell if it's a frog or a coffee cup . . . Do well on the mini-games and somehow guess what these pictures are and you'll make it around the board in no time at all. Though I'll warn you, the ending doesn't really fill you with the sense of pride that you might feel you've earned. Is it a great game? God, no. Is it a decent way to spend twenty minutes of your life? I guess so. To fairly analyze this game, ask yourself 'How bad COULD an NES *Pictionary* game have been?' Once you imagine that horror give this particular game another look. I think you'll find that it's as good as it could have been." —It's Different, I Hate It: Toys, Comics, etc. (itsdifferentihateit.blogspot.com)



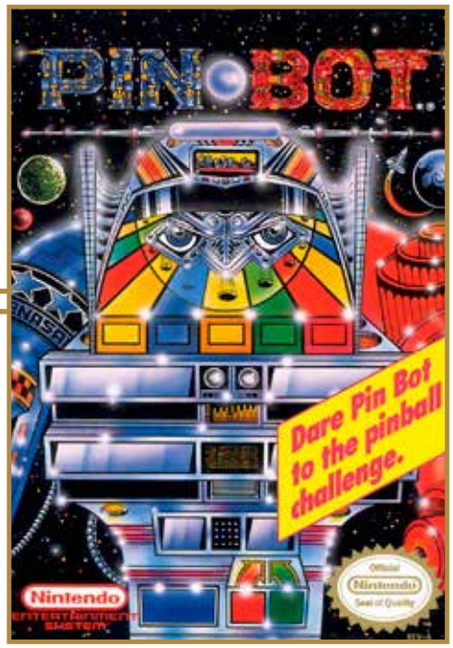




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pin Bot

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Pinball; 1–4 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1990.



Adapted from Williams's real 1986 pinball machine, *Pin Bot* for the NES does a nice job incorporating most of the elements found in the arcade original, including the robotic voice; the solar system theme; multiball play; chutes and jet bumpers; and the mysterious robot visor. In addition to retaining many of the features that made the game an arcade hit there are a number of new features well suited to the video format, such as different ball shapes, six progressive levels of difficulty, and enemies that attack the flippers and steal the ball. The playfield scrolls vertically, but contains a split to show the flippers at all times. The voice effects are a bit choppy, but not bad for the NES, and the graphics look enough like the original machine to receive a passing grade.

Notable Quotable:

"Great ball action, superb graphics, super sound and speech, and a rather addictive line in playability." —*Computer and Video Games* (March 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Proved the NES could quite neatly simulate the coin-op pinball experience . . . excellent ball physics which convincingly imitated the weight and movement of an actual pinball on a real table—something you rarely saw on hardware of this vintage." —Polygon (www.polygon.com), which ranked *Pin Bot* the 28th greatest NES game

Notable Quotable:

"A pinball game may seem a redundant idea, and I was doubtful at first this Rare conversion of the famous table would work. After playing it for a short while, however, I found this to be a cracking game—the ball movement is realistic (always the hardest thing to get right), the bonuses are tricky but rewarding, and the overall effect makes this the closest thing to a pinball table possible on a console. The graphics may seem somewhat bland, but that's only because the emphasis has been placed on the more important aspects of the game. The flippers respond perfectly, and the array of extra features make this game something special. For a change from the standard NES fare check this out." —*Mean Machines* (January 1991)

Insider Insight: In the '80s and '90s in the UK, the biggest electronics retailer was a company called Dixons. One thing I liked about the store was that it had a dedicated video game zone at the back with consoles set up to play. This was where I bought my Atari Lynx, because I knew I could try a couple of games before making my purchase.

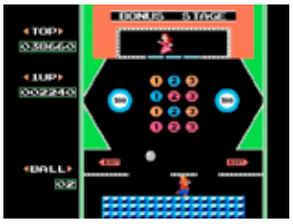
Around 1990 Dixons began selling the NES, after the exclusivity deal with Boots the Chemist had ended. One day I visited the local store in St. Albans and they had the system set up with *Pin Bot* playing. I was already a big pinball fan and was familiar with the original table so I made a beeline for it. I quickly became engrossed to the extent that my friends were telling me to hurry up and the store attendant was glaring at me.

I kept going back to Dixons to play the game, and on more than one occasion I was asked to leave because it was clear I wasn't buying anything. I tried to persuade my friend Martin to buy it, but he wasn't into pinball, so alas, once Dixons changed the game on display I never played it again. That was until the modern era when I discovered the delights of emulation, and *Pin Bot* is as good as I remember! —Kieren Hawken, an Englishman who has been writing about video games for 15 years

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pinball

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1.
GAME TYPE: Pinball; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1985.



Every console needs at least one pinball game, and this was the first of several for the NES. There's no nudge button for shaking the table (hence no chance of tilting the game), but this is a passable (if limited) version of the popular pastime. The table, which features bumpers, playing cards, seals, baby chicks popping out of eggs, spinners, and other targets, is basic in design and extends vertically over two nonscrolling screens, each of which has a pair of flippers. There's also a bonus stage screen (reachable by hitting the ball into a side pocket) where players guide Mario as he walks back and forth along the bottom of the playfield, using a construction girder to rebound the pinball back up into a playfield containing 12 bingo lamps, two bumpers, and a lady who walks back and forth along the top. When the damsel in distress falls Mario should save her. There's music during the title screen and right as play begins, but then it stops, making for a fairly quiet experience. Two game options influence ball speed and overall difficulty of play.

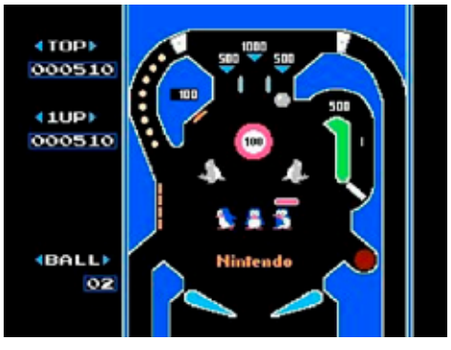
Memories: As a "pinball wizard" of sorts back in the day, racking up tons of free games on real pinball tables like *Firepower*, *Hot Hand*, and *Dolly Parton*, I really liked shoving the machine to influence the direction of the ball. Naturally I prefer pinball video games that include some semblance of this strategy in the form of a nudge button. Even so, I spent a fair amount of time with NES *Pinball* and always got excited to play the Mario bonus stage.

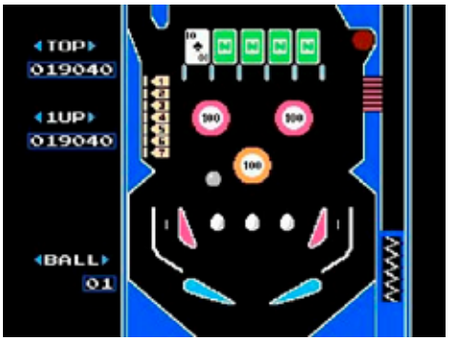
Notable Quotable:

"Although you only have two sets of paddles—there are no single paddles in this game—the lack of control or involvement is made up for by the crowded point scoring features . . . If you're a pinball fan you won't see the new features that are appearing on the latest coin-op games, but if you can't afford one of those in your hall, Nintendo's ball blazer provides an excellent alternative." —*Computer and Video Games* (September 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"Players can change the difficulty by increasing the speed, though neither fast nor slow reacts like a real pinball table . . . The graphics are understandably poor and the sound effects do their best job to annoy. Despite the unrealistic physics and the lackluster table I ended up having a good time racking up points in *Pinball*. There isn't enough depth here to keep you going for long, but I can see why people were so excited back in 1986. Like silent films a century ago, *Pinball* is a good first attempt. You can really see what Nintendo was aiming for all those years ago." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)





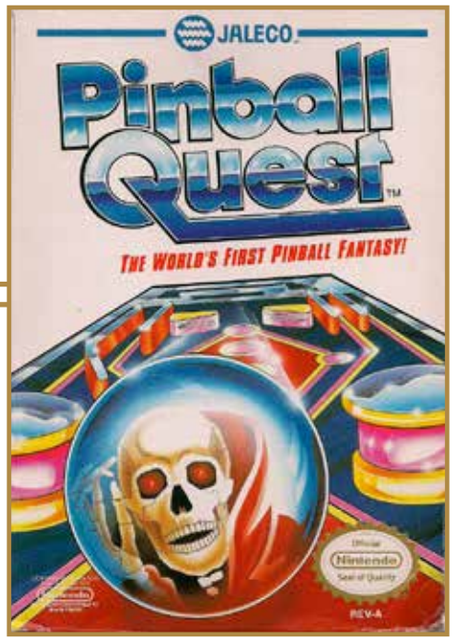
Insider Insight: I've been a silverball fanatic most of my life, but I was blown away by *Pinball* on the NES the first time I played it, which was more than 30 years ago. It wasn't the first virtual pinball game I'd ever played (Atari's 1977 *Video Pinball* console has that honor), and though it may seem like a primitive simulation by present-day standards, it was the first one that I thought felt spot-on with its speed and energy. The extra little touches, like animated sprites that spawned on the table or entire target arrays that would appear or disappear contextually during play, raised the game to a level of interactivity that, while visually simplistic, just wasn't possible on a real pinball table at the time. The game's bonus level was a miniaturized version of the arcade classic *Breakout*, but with the added challenge of rescuing a princess—as none other than *Mario*, no less!

All these years later I've had the opportunity to play a lot more pinball, both real and simulated, and out of all the pinball carts of that era (and even into the succeeding generation), Nintendo's original *Pinball* still plays more fluidly and more engagingly than most of its competitors, and I still enjoy playing it. Its design works well within the system's limitations while delivering an entertaining experience that was copied multiple times over the years, even across hardware generations. The idea of imbedding arcade style mini-games into a pinball table became a central tenet of many video pinball games. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pinball Quest

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Pinball; 1–4 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1990.



Offering a more expansive experience than a typical pinball game, *Pinball Quest* features four different tables, the foremost of which—RPG Mode—is a vertically scrolling castle composed of the following stages: Graveyard, Witch, Mines, River, Throne Room, and Final Battle. Targets to aim for in RPG Mode include tombstones, ghosts, knights, skull bumpers, turtles, and candles (among other items), and players can earn gold to shop for stoppers and stronger flippers. The storyline, which is told via text pop-ups, involves rescuing a princess kidnapped by goblins. The other three tables in this cartridge are more traditional. These include Pop! Pop!, which has a bowling and billiards theme; Circus, which includes slot machine bonus levels; and Viva! Golf, which features sand traps, gophers, and water hazards. Ball physics are loopy, but *Pinball Quest* offers a good variety of objectives, nicely detailed graphics, and fun gameplay.

Notable Quotable:

"A pretty good game with nicely designed tables. However, don't expect ball physics comparable to most modern pinball games . . . predicting how the ball will bounce off of objects and executing more advanced techniques will be more difficult than would be preferable—a problem that will be especially noticeable for expert pinball players . . . Even if you are not into pinball, its originality and the pure weirdness of the concept should be enough motivation to give *Pinball Quest* a chance." —Hardcore Gaming 101 (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Notable Quotable:

"I was so impressed with *Pinball Quest* on my Retro Bit Generations console that I decided to pony up for the real McCoy . . . The physics are not terrible and the tables scroll smoothly . . . One innovative feature is the ability to relocate your flippers to the high and low areas of the table by simply pressing up or down. That's kind of cool (I guess), but far too easy to do accidentally . . . Why not just have two sets of flippers? The three tables offer substantial replay value, but it's the RPG mode that puts this cart over the top." —Dave Mrozek (videogame-critic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"While the concept is strong, there are a few questionable gameplay decisions that sink this ambitious pinball game . . . the left flipper trigger is mapped to the d-pad. It's too easy to accidentally push up/down instead of left/right, which is the kind of mistake that will cost you a life. The game also has problems with check points, especially when it comes to boss battles. You'll work so hard to finally make it into the castle to battle the boss, only to lose and have to start the whole process over again. This is made considerably worse with the funky physics and board glitches. The ball doesn't even pretend to move realistically, often with humorous results. The unrealistic physics may be explainable in the quest mode, but it's unacceptable when trying to play one of the standard tables . . . The graphics are also mediocre, offering solid colors and very little detail . . . full of design issues and physics problems. —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

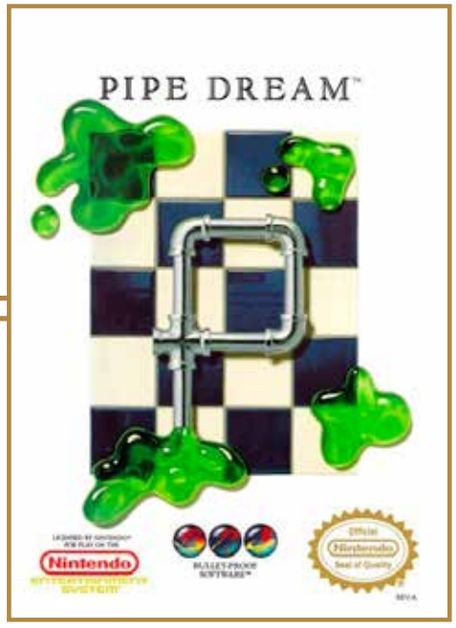
Insider Insight: Ever since I first fired up *Final Fantasy* I've been crazy about role playing games. The same can be said about video pinball from the first time I tried *Pinball* on the Atari 2600. So, when I saw an NES game on the rental shelf that was crazy enough to combine the two, you know I had to try it!

And what a weird little game it was! My friends and I fell in love with *Pinball Quest* almost immediately. It's not a bad game of video pinball in and of itself, and the three included tables are a good time waster. But bolting RPG elements on top of the game and turning it into a multilevel trek through fields and castles, complete with boss fights and buying new gear, is just inspired. Sure, the physics aren't amazing, but that was never enough to dampen my enjoyment of this unique game. —Greg Sewart, game developer, former Previews and Reviews Editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pipe Dream

PUBLISHER: Bullet-Proof Software.
DEVELOPER: Distinctive Software.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1990.



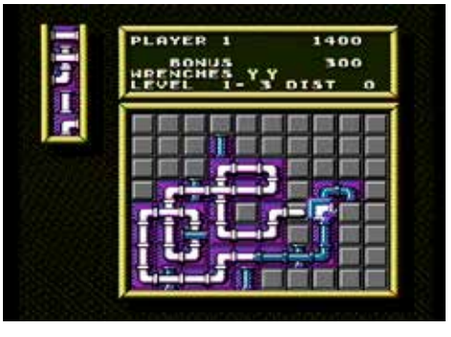
Featuring 16 increasingly difficult levels, *Pipe Dream* is a nicely realized console adaptation of the 1989 computer game *Pipe Mania*. In this addictive and challenging puzzler, which may be an acquired taste for some, you place pipe pieces of varying shapes strategically on a grid. As play begins a pipe piece appears, and that piece must be positioned on the board, but the pieces cannot be rotated. And then another appears and so on. To remove a previously placed pipe, a new one can be placed on top of it. There are several types of pipes, including one-way, reservoir, tunnel, and end piece. The objective is to construct a continuous pipe, enabling a substance called "flooz" to flow unobstructed through said pipe. Level progression requires flooz to pass through a certain number of pipes.

Notable Quotable:

"*Pipe Dream* is a simple game, perhaps even more so than *Tetris* itself. You can choose between three catchy (but quickly irritating) tunes before play, and it has a suitably panic-inducing tune for when the flooz is nearing the end of the pipeline. It's a bit drab looking, but games like this don't really need, and seldom receive, fancy graphics. The hook games like this need is just that—an inherent addictive quality to keep you coming back, and *Pipe Dream* has it. It's great fun to play, and with some practice you can create huge, grid-filling pipelines and rack up big scores. It's not the most addictive game I've ever played, and doesn't topple the mighty *Tetris*, but it's a great game to play for short bursts before you realize you've been playing it for hours!" —Simon Lethbridge (obsoletegamer.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Like most puzzle games, the graphics of *Pipe Dream* aren't very elaborate but they get the job done. You only see the playfield and the pipes, but the pipes do have a nice look to them, and the colors change with every level. It's also easy to see the flooz flowing through the pipes so you're never lost on where it's going. Just like the visuals, the game's audio isn't special but is still adequate . . . The controls are simple to use . . . The game is a blast to play. Its simple design makes it easy to get into, and it also has a good learning curve. The first few levels are pretty easy, allowing beginners to find their legs, but before long the cart gets challenging, especially when the flooz starts flowing more rapidly. The later levels will definitely strain your brain, forcing you to think ahead, and many times you'll have to improvise . . . Sometimes the game can get frustrating, especially when you can't seem to get the piece you desperately need in the higher levels and you have no way of saving yourself." —NES Times (www.nestimes.net)



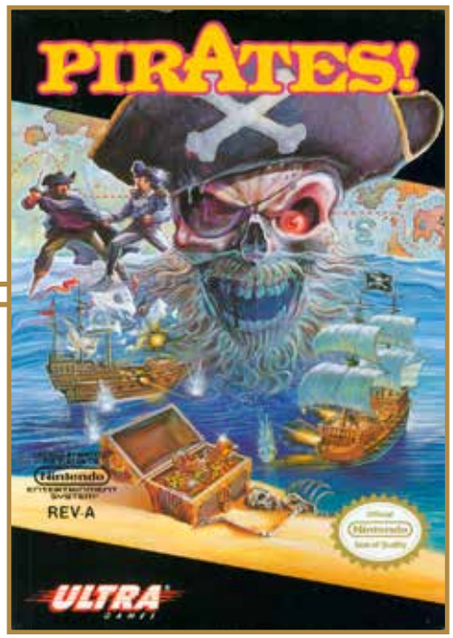
Insider Insight: This unique puzzle game is better known to those of us in Europe as *Pipe Mania*, although I prefer the cleverer North American title. The first time I played the game was a demo of the ZX Spectrum version that came on a magazine cover tape, and I was instantly addicted. That demo only had a few levels, which wasn't enough to satisfy—I desperately needed more! I remember telling my friends how great it was, many of whom proclaimed that it "looked boring" before playing it and changing their minds. People talk about *Tetris* being a puzzle game sensation, but when I was in school it was definitely *Pipe Dream*, at least for a while. Thankfully the game was released for most home computers as well as the NES, so we were all able to grab one of the many versions and satisfy our pipe-placing addiction.

To this day I am both shocked and surprised that the popularity of *Pipe Dream* hasn't endured. Aside from those original home versions and the V-System arcade game there is a 3D version for the first PlayStation console, as well as a more modern remake for the PS2, PC, Wii, DS, PSP, and iPhone. Unfortunately both of these titles have largely flown under the radar. This just seems like the perfect game to be exploited for modern platforms, especially phones and tablets. And who wouldn't want a new console version with online leaderboards and a level designer? For me, *Pipe Dream* remains one of the greatest puzzle games ever made. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for more than 15 years

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pirates!

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Action/Adventure/Role-Playing Game; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



An excellent adaptation of *Sid Meier's Pirates!*, the classic, open-ended computer game from 1987, *Pirates!* lets you portray one of four swashbuckling scoundrels: an English Buccaneer, a Dutch Adventurer, a Spanish Renegade, or a French Explorer, each with a different skill level. As the high seas hijacker of choice you'll barter with enemy merchants, plunder towns, lay siege to forts, trade for hidden treasure maps, forge alliances with monarchs, negotiate with crooked governors, engage in sword fights with garrison commanders (from a side view perspective), and fire cannons at an armada of naval foes (from an overhead perspective), including Spanish War Galleons, Dutch Frigates, French Merchantmen, and English Sloops. You can even visit taverns and get married (aarrr!). The complex gameplay takes place during six different real life pirate raids along the Spanish Main: The Silver Empire (1560), Merchants & Smugglers (1600), The New Colonists (1620), War for Profit (1640), The Bucaneer Heroes (1660), and Pirates' Sunset (1680). The game, which is deep and will keep you busy for many hours, originally came packaged with a historically accurate map of the Spanish Main.

Notable Quotable:

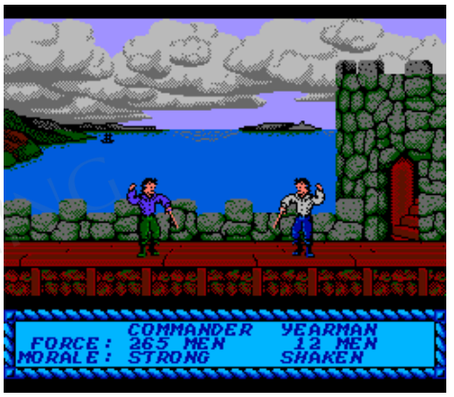
"I'll admit that *Pirates!* is not the type of game that I get into, but giving it credit, the game does take some unique play mechanics and roll them together into a cohesive game. The action does get too repetitive, however, and overall any real excitement is seldom found." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1991)

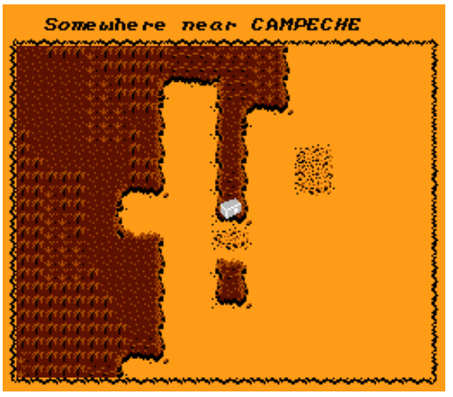
Notable Quotable:

What makes *Pirates!* an experience to remember is the same thing that would have made *Elite* great if Imagineer hadn't made a mess of it: freedom. Like *Elite* and many later games, including the *Grand Theft Auto* and *Elder Scrolls* series, *Pirates!* turns the player loose in its world with a few hints as to what you might want to do, but no pressure to actually follow that route . . . it looks hideous. I bought this game when it was only a year or so old and even then it wasn't pretty . . . The control scheme can be pretty clunky. Ships generally feel heavy to turn, and although this is presumably intentional with the larger vessels it can still be frustrating." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"For an NES title, *Pirates!* is a surprisingly deep mix of text-based strategy, sea battles, and sword fights . . . The sword fights aren't much to look at thanks to swords that look more like batons. Otherwise, *Pirates!*' graphics are bright and inviting, with scenic towns and dark taverns rendered in meticulous detail. I also love the shimmering bright blue sea and the swashbuckling musical score. Patient gamers will relish the layers of strategy, which include opportunities to spread your influence, betray treaties, marry a wench, and discover lost treasure. Less patient gamers like myself, however, are likely to lose interest over time due to the sluggish sea battles and repetitive nature of it all." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)





© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Platoon

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/First-Person Shooter/Third-Person Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1988.

Platoon is loosely based on Oliver Stone's 1986 war movie, which won the Oscar for Best Picture. You guide an American soldier through the heart of a confusing, dead end laden Vietnamese jungle, dodging air strikes, barbed wire, booby traps, trip wires, and other obstacles while shooting guerillas and snipers with an M-16 rife. You can also hurl grenades and search inside huts. If you kill innocent villagers it will lower your morale. If you kill six innocents it's game over. The Jungle & Village stage features a side view perspective, while Tunnel System and The Bunker have players guiding a crosshair targeting sight. The final stage, 3-D Jungle, shows your character from behind. You'll battle across bridges, through tunnels and jungles, and into the heart of an enemy bunker. You'll blow up bridges as well. In addition to shooting and getting shot (cheap hits are plentiful) you will look for such helpful items as food, ammo, a torch, a map, flares, a compass, and medical supplies.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are well-defined and give you an ominous feel of the jungle, tunnels, etc. It's a difficult assignment and very frightening." —*Computer Entertainer* (March 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"The introductory and ending cinemas, the jungle's huge character sprites set against detailed backdrops, and the smooth scrolling in the first person view of the tunnels look impressive, though these are countered by the grainy and comparatively lackluster visuals of the third and fourth stages. The music is irritating, featuring short loops of tinny, uninspired 8-bit beeps that do nothing to enhance the onscreen action, serving only to irritate the player. The controls are reasonably responsive and rarely hinder progress. *Platoon*'s fatal flaw is its reliance on mazes to extend the length of the game. The first stage is so confusing that the manual recommends that the first-time player draw a map to keep track of their bearings in the jungle . . . The second stage provides an onscreen map to help guide the player through another maze, though it shows such a small portion of the tunnel network at a time that its use is severely limited. The fourth and final stage features yet another maze, this time featuring more booby traps and wild ammo spray from enemies than any stage before it, making it feel less like a legitimate challenge and more like a desperate attempt to eke out a bit more longevity from this otherwise incredibly short cartridge." —NintendoComplete.com

Insider Insight: The NES is full of bizarre licenses like *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street*, but *Platoon* feels by far the weirdest. I remember seeing the game in the little rental shop down the street and wondering how they could have possibly translated an anti-Vietnam war film full of drug use, murdered villagers, and betrayal into a fun video game. But I was willing to give any Sunsoft game a legitimate try.

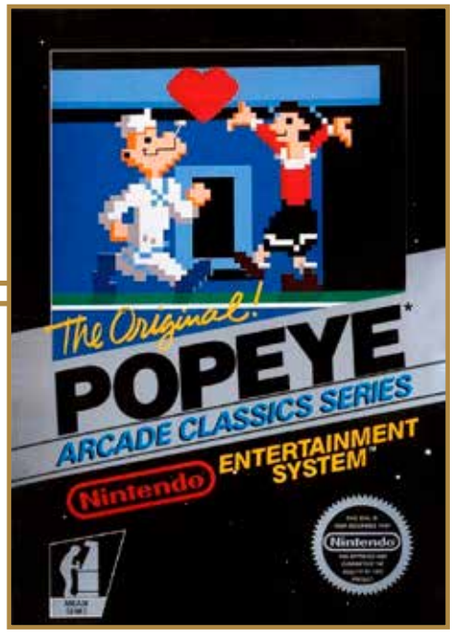
I don't think I ever made it out of the opening jungle maze more than once in the dozens of times I rented and played the game. I had somehow convinced myself there was brilliance to be found in the depths of this cartridge, if I could only uncover it.

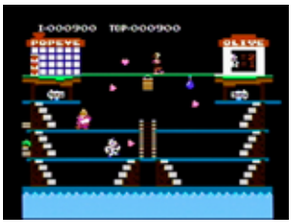
I rented *Platoon* so many times that I ended up owning it after the rental store went out of business and there was no way to return the cartridge to the owners. To this day I've never beaten it. I've watched the film dozens of times, though. Unlike the game, it's a true classic. —Greg Sewart, game developer, former Previews and Reviews Editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Popeye

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1.
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1986.





A cute, colorful climbing game, *Popeye* lets you control the famous spinach-loving sailor. In each of the three rounds of play Brutus, your big, bearded foe, chases you around a series of platforms, ladders, and stairways, trying to punch you out. You must grab all the items your gal pal Olive Oyl floats down from the top of the screen: hearts, love notes, and letters spelling out HELP. The first two rounds are played on basic platforms, while the third takes place on a boat. You are powerless against Brutus unless you eat the can of spinach you'll find on each level of play. This temporarily gives you the ability to punch him off the screen. In addition, you must avoid or punch flying bottles, bouncing skulls, and the Sea Hag's vulture Bernard (you must be energized by spinach to punch out a vulture). During the second stage watch for floating Swee'Pea, who you can bounce up to and grab for extra points. A nicely programmed port of Nintendo's 1982 arcade classic, the game is only missing a few minor flourishes, including the "Popeye!! Catch" text and Popeye holding out a flower at the beginning of the game, Wimpy eating hamburgers during the second screen, and the celebratory giant Popeye face that appears after the third stage.

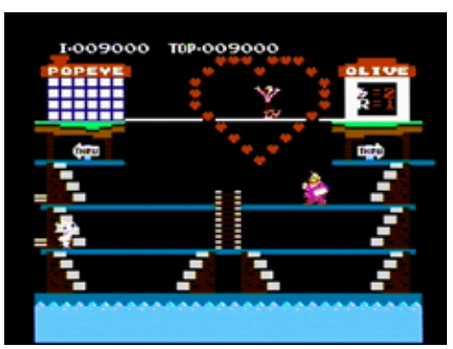
Memories: I played the heck out of the ColecoVision version of *Popeye* when it came out and I absolutely loved the cartoonlike arcade game, which I still play when I see it at a retro arcade. So of course I was thrilled when the NES version was released and discovered it was even better than the ColecoVision game. I enjoy nonscrolling platformers in general, such as *Donkey Kong*, *Mario Bros.*, *Beauty & the Beast* (Intellivision), *BurgerTime*, and *Pick Axe Pete!* (Odyssey2).

Memories: Several years ago, in an article for *RETRO* magazine, I made the case that Popeye was the world's first superhero. I wrote, "Who was the first comic-strip- or comic-book-based superhero? Most would say Siegel and Shuster's Superman, who debuted in 1938 in *Action Comics* #1. Others would make the case for Lee Falk's 1936 creation, The Phantom, who had a mask and colorful costume, but no superpowers. My vote goes to Popeye the Sailor Man, created by Elzie Segar for the Thimble Theater newspaper strip in 1929. Before you scoff, consider the fact that he wears a costume—a sailor suit—and has superpowers. After eating a can of spinach, Popeye gets super strong (and nigh invulnerable) to the point of punching arch nemesis Bluto to the moon, spinning his pipe to make him fly, destroying tanks with his bare hands, and closing the Grand Canyon by pulling it together with a rope. He has also exhibited super speed."

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

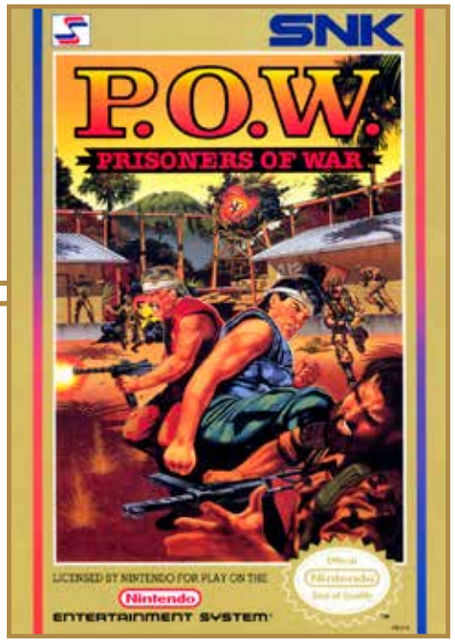
"This one in some ways reminds us of Activision's *Kaboom!*, as Popeye races from side to side catching Olive's items. The difference here, of course, is the vertical as well as horizontal aspect of his movement, as well as his enemies coming after him. While it's a cute game, we're not sure if it's one that will keep you satisfied hour after hour." —*Computer Entertainer* (August 1986)

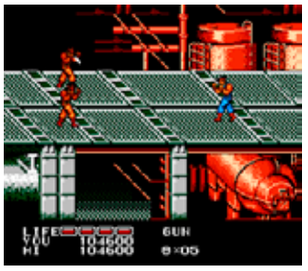


Insider Insight: *Popeye* was one of the first games I owned for the NES, and I found it to be a pretty faithful recreation of the arcade classic. As someone who grew up on Popeye comic books I was glad to see Bluto and the Sea Hag as the game's antagonists. I can't tell you how many hours I spent beating these levels and collecting those hearts. Despite my love for the characters, I'm not sure why I played *Popeye* so much since it's a simplistic game with only three screens. —Chris Bores, The Irate Gamer on YouTube

P.O.W.: Prisoners of War

PUBLISHER: SNK.
DEVELOPER: SNK.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat; 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.





In *P.O.W.: Prisoners of War*, which is a solid beat-'em-up game, you play as special forces agent Bart, who must walk (somewhat slowly) and climb his way through four nicely illustrated levels: Escape from Prison Camp, Attacking the Industrial Area, Guerilla Attack in the Jungle, and Destruction of Communications Headquarters. To battle the commandoes, frogmen, motorcycle warriors, green berets, machine gunners, grenade-throwing soldiers, and other enemies you'll confront you can punch and kick them, including jump kicks. By entering huts or defeating certain bad guys you can obtain weaponry, including grenades, brass knuckles, a bullet proof vest, a combat knife, and a machine gun. You will certainly need some of these weapons when battling a helicopter and an armored personnel carrier.

These bosses were strictly background vehicles in the arcade version, which SNK released in 1988. In addition, Bart couldn't enter huts in the coin-op game. Conversely, in this port Bart can't head butt enemies, certain animations are missing, and the two-player simultaneous mode is gone. However, it plays pretty well—just don't expect a lengthy or super deep game.

Notable Quotable:

"*P.O.W.* is not an overly complex or diverse game, but it does have great graphics and play. The game would get repetitive if it weren't for the constantly changing environments and cast of characters . . . a very addictive play mechanic that is similar to *Double Dragon*." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1989)

Notable Quotable:

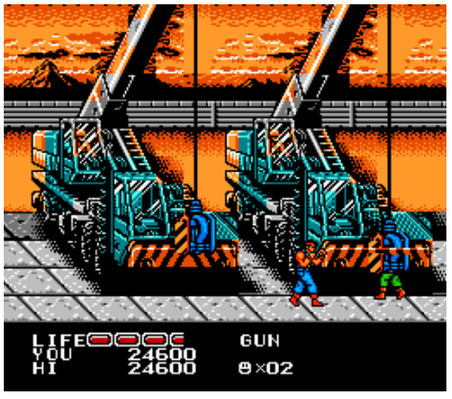
"A good adaptation of the 1988 arcade game, *P.O.W.: Prisoners of War* faithfully reproduces the repetitive punching-and-kicking action of the original . . . Effective use of shading and the NES' color palette let the graphics stand on their own rather than feel like a watered down version of the arcade game." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

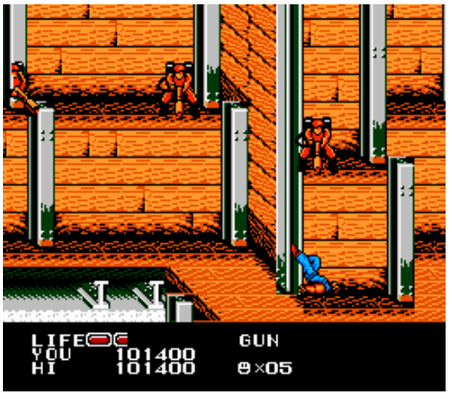
Notable Quotable:

"Outstanding graphics—good background designs and clearly defined characters. You can even see Bart's bulging muscles. As the screen gets crowded with characters, however, there's a lot of flicker to contend with. The sound quality—both music and noises—is excellent . . . The gunshots and explosions are all first rate . . . the action is fast paced and exciting." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"Like most of SNK's NES games, *Prisoners of War* looks great. Obviously it can't match its big brother, but they have done a particularly excellent job of adapting its look. The sprites are larger than in most similar games, and even with three or four on screen it never slows down. Most of the level additions keep the same tone in terms of art, and even the new bosses look great. The soundtrack is similarly excellent; the music is all new specific to this version and a bit more energetic than its arcade counterpart, but still fits the game's tone." —Classic-Games.Net (www.classic-games.net)

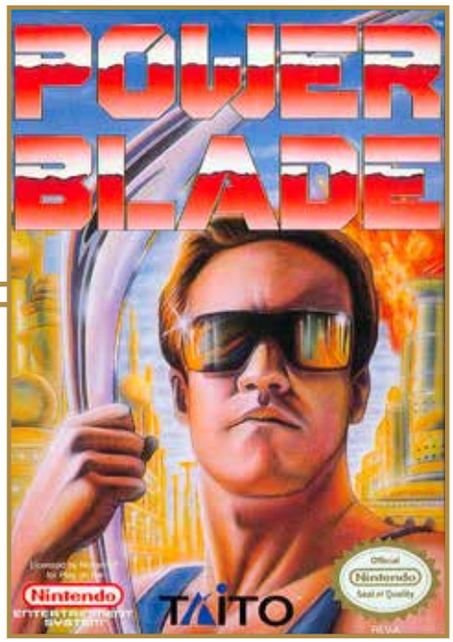




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Power Blade

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Natsume.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

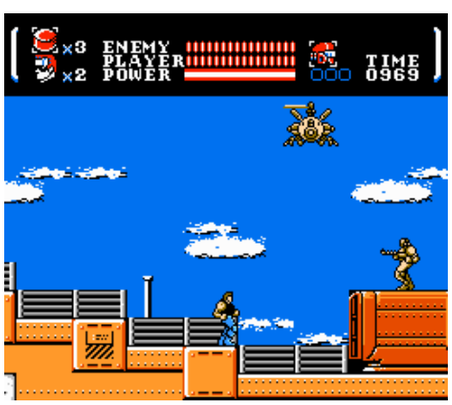


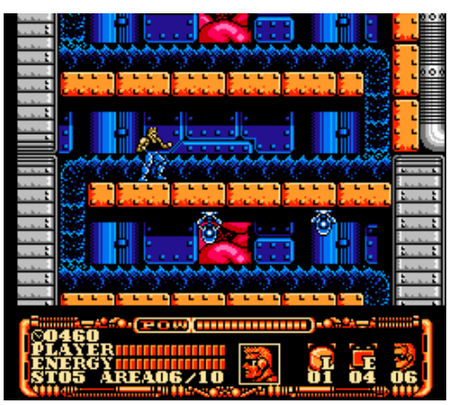
In the year 2191 the Master Computer does all our work, making New Earth a virtual utopia. Unfortunately, alien terrorists take the computer off-line. As NOVA, the Master Computer's Chief Security Officer, you must retrieve the "brains" of the computer and restore Systems Control. In addition to being a computer expert you are an excellent physical specimen (you can run, jump, and climb amazingly well) and the master of the legendary Power Blade, which is a specially charged boomerang. Throughout the game you can pick up items to enhance the power and distance of the boomerang, as well as enable you to throw two or three boomerangs at once. There are other helpful items to grab as well, including grenades and a metal, shield-like suit. The game has six sectors, playable in whatever order you wish. After battling your way through the ghosts, soldiers, bats, spaceships, and other enemies in a particular sector you must find the agent assigned to that sector so he can give you the ID card that will grant you passage into the Data Base. Then you must find the Data Base, enter the Security Room, and go up against a powerful guard (boss) whom you must defeat to retrieve the tape unit. To enter the Control Center you must obtain all six tapes.

© SCHILLER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Graphically it's nothing to write home about—the sprites are nicely drawn but small and poorly animated, and sonically it's just average. However, the gameplay is superb. Power Blade himself is easy to control, and the collision detection is perfect. The wealth of power-ups adds a lot to the action, as does the maze-like structure of the complex, meaning you have to find a route through instead of just walking left to right . . . a fun game." —*Mean Machines* (November 1991)



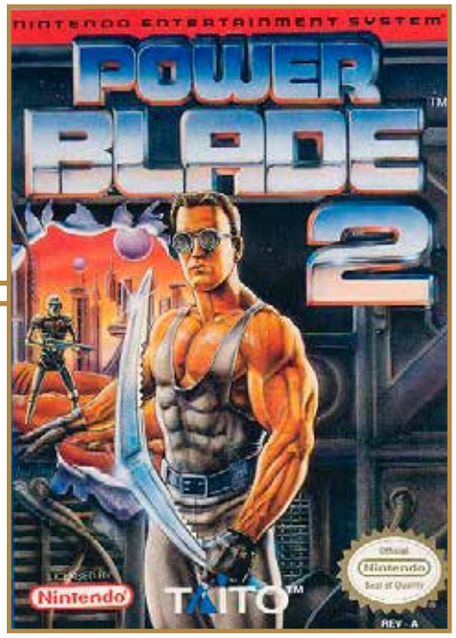


Insider Insight: During the late '80s and early '90s kids thought boomerangs were the coolest. Or maybe it was just me and my friends. Either way, while browsing through my local rental store I happened upon this fantastic little game called *Power Blade*. I picked it up assuming, as one would, that the game would feature some sort of super cool sword. But, BUT, this hero did not carry a sword. He wielded a boomerang! One that could be thrown in any direction! I got serious *Mega Man* vibes playing the game over that weekend and knew I had to own it. It was an absolute blast to play through over and over again because it was just so damn fun. Flinging that boomerang around and gaining power-ups to make it, and you, more powerful never got old. It still holds up and should have a place in every NES collection. —Dan Ryan, cohost of the *Stone Age Gamer* podcast, writer of beer, wrestling, gaming, kung-fu, and other geeky articles for geekade.com

Insider Insight: Towards the end of the NES era I definitely knew what I liked. I absolutely adored the *Mega Man* series. When I received an issue of *Nintendo Power* that featured *Power Blade* on the cover it looked good, but I didn't realize the gameplay was basically *Mega Man* with improvements. I rented it expecting a decent game, as most of the *Nintendo Power* cover games were. The first thing I noticed were the controls were tight, much like a *Mega Man* game. The level layouts were better than expected, requiring some backtracking and exploring to find items needed to proceed. I loved the upgrade system, allowing you to throw your boomerang farther and to throw more at the same time. It even had a level select system like *Mega Man*. It took a while, but I eventually bought the game when my rental store began phasing out NES cartridges. When I started collecting seriously for the NES in the early 2000s I bought the sequel, *Power Blade 2*, which I didn't even know about when I was a kid. —Chris Leathco, blogger at Retro Gaming Roundup, author of *Afterglow* and *The Virtual Boy Game Library*

Power Blade 2

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Natsume.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



This sequel to *Power Blade* once again puts you in control of Special Agent NOVA, who wields a formidable, upgradeable, boomerang-like blade that is throwable in eight directions. He jumps on moving platforms and over gaps, avoids descending ceilings, and battles such enemies as wall cannons, robots, fish, slime monsters, and caterpillars. However, he has learned a few new tricks, including the ability to slide under low obstacles and enemy fire (à la *Mega Man 3*). In addition, each of the game's four selectable stages contains a special power suit you can acquire by defeating a dragon robot boss in the middle of the level. The Newt Suit allows Nova to cling to and move along walls and ceilings. The Wet Suit lets him move quickly under water. The Rocket Suit enables him to fly, while the Patriot Suit has twin orbs that circle around Nova's body and absorb enemy fire. While Nova is wearing one of the suits the weapon becomes the Power Blade, which is more powerful than the standard boomerang-like blade but doesn't return. After the four levels, which you can play in any order, a fifth level opens up. The overall objective in *Power Blade 2*, which is harder to find than the uncommon but more obtainable *Power Blade*, is to defeat an evil corporation and destroy its cyborg army.

Notable Quotable:

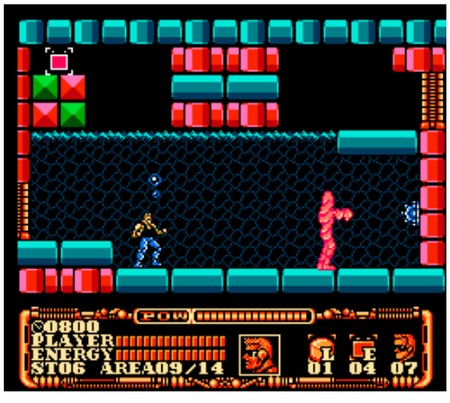
"*Power Blade 2* marks a better visual adventure, up a couple of notches from the original, but the game control and lack of a punchy control technique left me feeling sort of average . . . would have profited from some additional attention to the way it played instead of how it looked in comparison to its namesake." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1992)

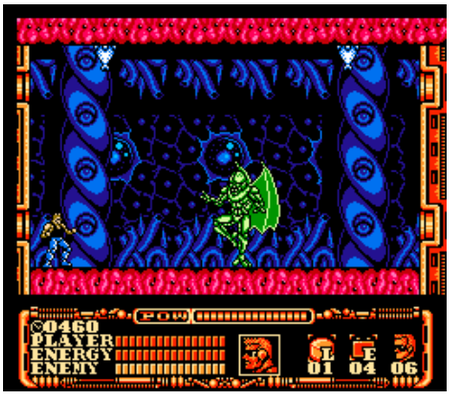
Notable Quotable:

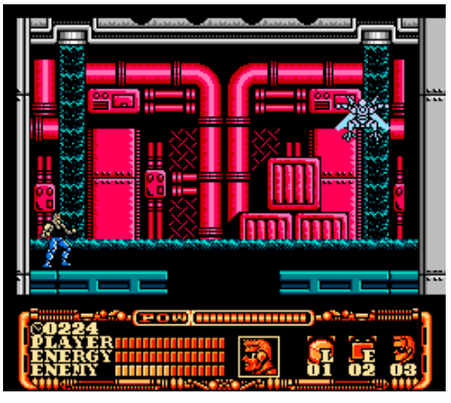
"Although *Power Blade* was an action platformer, it was unique in that you had to find a contact before being able to face the end level boss. The levels were huge as a result, with plenty of secrets. *Power Blade 2* tosses that element and is a straightforward action game instead . . . Since you aren't exploring the levels and forging your own path time isn't really a factor anymore. Without that element *Power Blade 2* resembles many prior NES titles like *Shatterhand* or *Shadow of the Ninja*. That isn't bad company to be in, but *Power Blade 2* shows its hand pretty early and is repetitive. The levels are still massive, and unfortunately they drag on . . . a good game but still disappointing." —Classic-Games.Net (www.classic-games.net)

Notable Quotable:

"In Japan, Taito took the character from *Power Blade* and put him in a sequel, this time calling it *Captain Saver*. However, when it came to America it was retitled *Power Blade 2*. Unfortunately, Taito nerfed a lot of what made the original *Power Blade* so cool. The game controls pretty much the same as *Power Blade*, although the hero seems to walk a bit slower. To make up for this you have a slide technique, which allows you to move faster and slip underneath enemy fire. All of the stages (four selectable, with six in total, one less overall than its predecessor) are completely linear. Both *Power Blazer* and *Power Blade* had very bright, aesthetically pleasing graphics, with a variety of different tile sets. Here the graphics are much darker and generic so it looks much worse. The music is alright, but isn't nearly as catchy." —Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



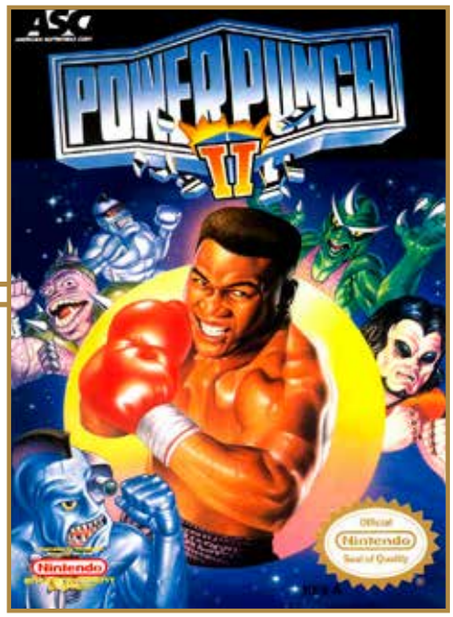




©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Power Punch II

PUBLISHER: American Softworks.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Boxing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



Initially produced under the working title "Mike Tyson's Intergalactic Power Punch," *Power Punch II* was originally intended to be a follow-up to *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*, but Tyson's legal difficulties regarding the trial for the rape of Desiree Washington during the production of the game caused Nintendo to back out of the project and Beam Software to change the principal boxer's name to Mark "Tough Guy" Tyler (his appearance was altered as well). Gameplay evokes *Punch-Out!!* to some degree (the view is behind the player's fighter) but a variety of features were added, including: cutscenes; a side view training mode (which takes place on an intergalactic transport shuttle); and 12 alien opponents, including 9763 Borg, Helmet Skull, Grathnox 4 (a tank from the waist down), and "Fighting" Fly-Mo (a flying saucer from the waist down). Despite these additions *Punch-Out!!* is a far superior and, of course, more popular game.

Notable Quotable:

"The boxing ring/arena in this game is really odd, in the sense that it doesn't resemble one. In every level you look to be inside a different colored bar with a few bartenders and patrons yelling at you. There is no referee or crowd . . . The music is boring and doesn't have many tracks, and the sound is extremely generic . . . tough boxing game with unpredictable patterns at first. Once you can figure out the characters it can be as predictable as *Punch Out!!* However, it is an extremely steep learning curve. The final boss is unforgiving and you can die in seconds if you aren't prepared . . . Even though *Power Punch II* is one tough beast, that doesn't make up for its extreme lack of overall quality." —Underrated Retro (underratedretro.com)

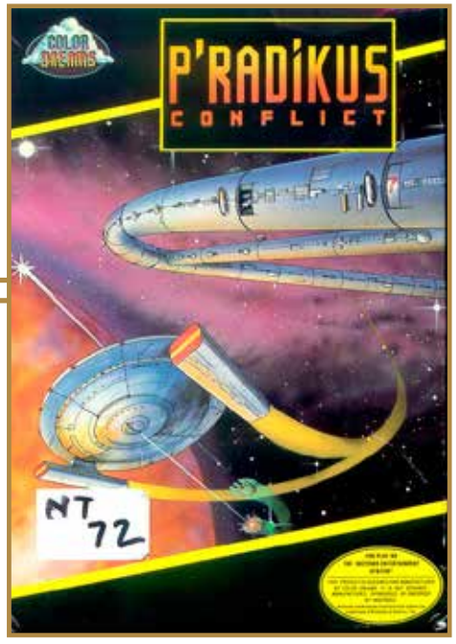
Notable Quotable:

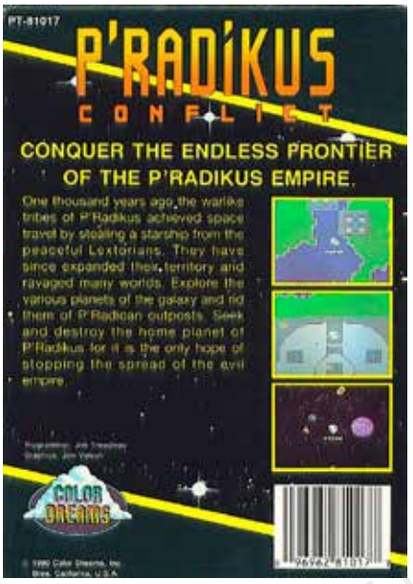
"The essence of the *Punch-Out!!* gameplay is entirely removed—there's no counterattacking, and thus no real strategy. It's just punching, dodging, and more punching. The computer-controlled combatants are grossly overpowered and always command the fight. They have an overwhelming reach, and they back up to dodge your attacks. That would be just fine, if only you could do the same thing. You can only move left and right. That's not even a sidestep like the usual *Punch-Out!!* norm, but just slowly inching either left or right. While the opponent is able to dance all over the place you are stuck on a single plane. Want to give your opponent a swift uppercut? Go ahead. Oh wait, he moved back one inch, making you miss entirely. Another horrific downfall of this game during the fights is the sheer power of your opponents. They can attack you with quick jabs that quickly reduce life gauge, while it takes 20 jabs of your own to bring the enemies' life gauge down even one notch . . . From a technical standpoint the game is mediocre at best." —Charles P. Gill (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

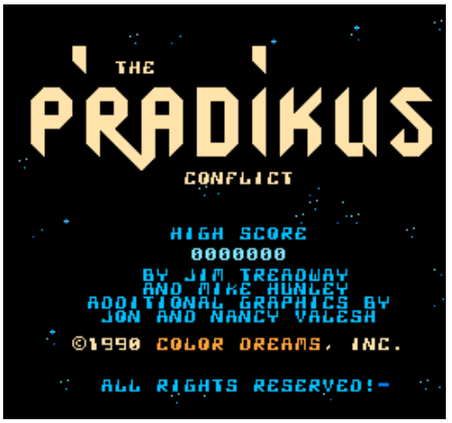
© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The P'radikus Conflict

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams.
DEVELOPER: Color Dreams.
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



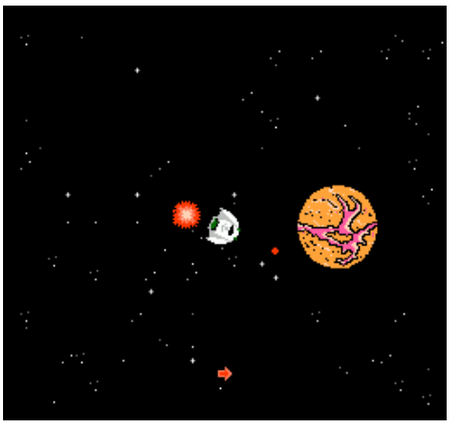




In this unlicensed, hard-to-find game, the spaceship you pilot rotates and thrusts like the ship in *Asteroids* but the screen scrolls in all directions, making the game more resemble such free-roaming shooters as *Bosconian* and *Sinistar*. Unlike those comparative arcade classics, however, *P'radikus Conflict* is rather easy (thanks to dumb enemies that fire slow projectiles) and certainly more complex. While flying through space, blasting fighters, battle cruisers, scout ships, armed transport vessels, and other enemy ships into oblivion, you earn credits to purchase fuel, armor, shields, and warp drive. You can also obtain weapons, such as shock waves, mines, missiles, atomic cannons, lasers, and cloaking devices. Some enemies will fire at your ship while others attempt to crash into you head-on. The mission-based gameplay has you performing such actions as orbiting planets, freeing aliens, warping to different planets and star systems, and trashing enemy space stations. Your ultimate objective is to seek and destroy planet P'radikus, home to evil warriors who achieved space travel by stealing a starship from the peaceful Lextorians. *P'radikus Conflict* plays better and is more ambitious than most Color Dreams games, and it's cool you can upgrade your ship to such a degree. The action is relatively nonlinear and open ended and gamers can explore a large area of space, but it still has a bit of that Color Dreams cheapness to it.

Notable Quotable:

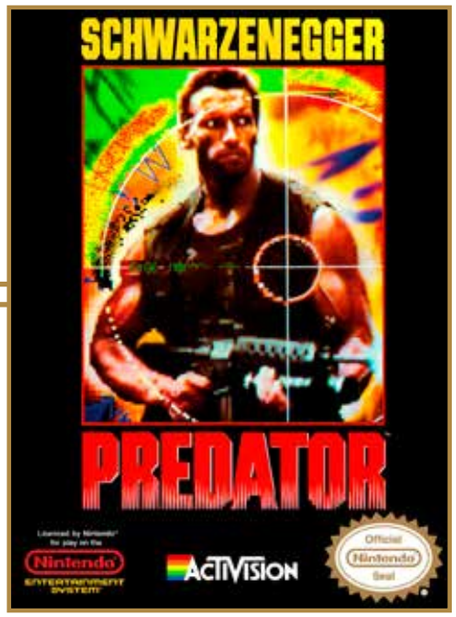
"This reeks of *Star Trek*, long nights of developing/programming, and cheap booze . . . Progress in the game pretty much resembles this: warp somewhere (seriously anywhere, it doesn't matter), destroy hostile alien spaceships and alien outposts, make some money, upgrade your ship, do it again. Problem is, there's a whole butt-ton of galaxies and planets to explore, and every single one of them has enemies. Do you visit every planet, or are there only certain ones you need to go to in order to progress? I couldn't tell, and I didn't feel like fighting swarms of never-ending snack treats to figure it out. The shooting portions control like *Asteroids*, which is to say clunky and terrible. It's almost better not to fly around. Shoot the enemies as they come to you . . . This conflict is a bust." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

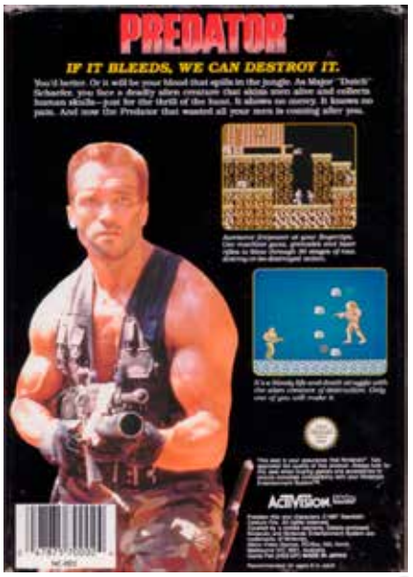


©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Predator

PUBLISHER: Activision.
DEVELOPER: Pack-In-Video.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



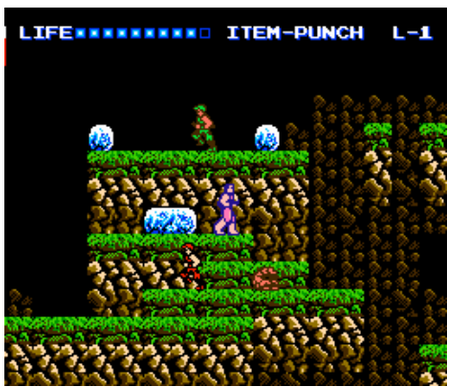


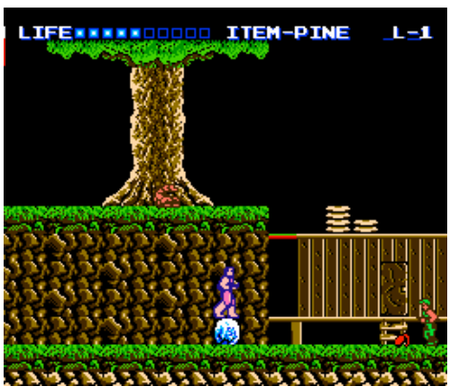
Loosely based on the excellent 1987 sci-fi/action flick, *Predator* stars Dutch Schaefer, the character Arnold Schwarzenegger played in the movie. After viewing an impressive intro and title screen you, as Dutch, begin the game armed with nothing but your fists for punching enemies. However, you can pick up a machine gun, a laser rifle, and grenades as you run, jump across chasms, avoid rolling boulders, and otherwise make your way through a scorpion- and guerilla-infested South American jungle. You can also acquire different types of bullets, including boomerang, continuous, shotgun, and reaction, the last of which automatically destroys all onscreen enemies except the Predator, who shows up periodically. After battling through a jungle/platforming area you should exit via a cave that will take you to the next stage. If there are two caves you must select one. After every few stages you'll enter Big Mode, a side-scrolling shooter area where Dutch, appearing very tall and toting a machine gun, runs along dodging, ducking, and shooting spheres, floating Predator heads, and the Predator himself. While *Predator* starts off with a bang (before you actually start playing, that is), it's just another bad NES game with a sexy movie license.

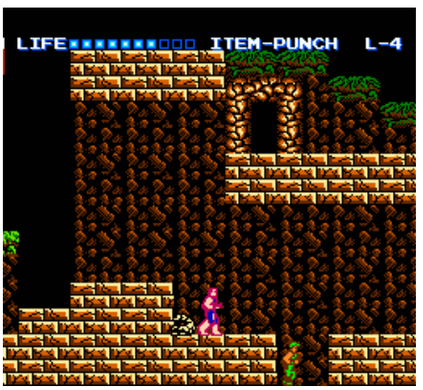
Memories: During the late '80s and early '90s, I babysat a couple of kids for a good friend of mine. The oldest was a boy, and he would always want to go to the local video rental store to pick up a couple of NES games, which we usually did. We had fun playing *Duck Hunt*, *Super Mario Bros.*, *World Class Track Meet*, and a few other games he owned, but his rental choices were typically movie-based, which meant they were usually awful. *Predator* definitely fell into this category, but he played the heck out of it anyway, trying to get his money's worth (well, it was actually his mom's money, but I digress . . .).

Notable Quotable:
"I'm pretty sure I cursed the game for being a waste of programmers' time . . . the gameplay is disgusting; the graphics (besides the introduction) are appalling, and the enemies remind me of a poorly hacked ROM." —Retro Junk (www.retrojunk.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The stages are so poorly constructed that a 'self-destruct' mechanism had to be included . . . Some stages offer multiple paths, but I'd recommend taking the high road to avoid crawling rocks, scorpions, and crazy people . . . the jumping controls aren't bad . . . The initial encounter with Predator is anticlimactic, as you simply shoot him 14 times as he somersaults around . . . The game is technically deficient." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)



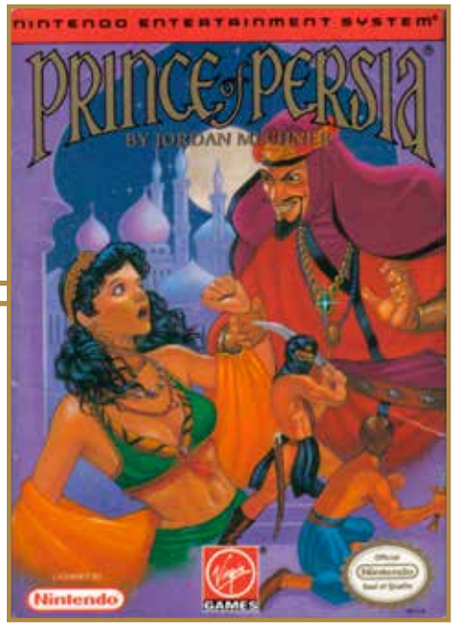




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Prince of Persia

PUBLISHER: Virgin Games.
DEVELOPER: MovieTime.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure Puzzle; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



A scaled-down but respectable adaptation of Jordan Mechner's popular computer game that Broderbund released in 1989, *Prince of Persia* puts you in the role of a young adventurer who has been thrown into a dungeon by the evil and traitorous Jaffar, Grand Vizier to the Sultan of Persia. The nicely animated hero has escaped his cell, but he must brave 12 levels of the obstacle-filled dungeon to rescue the proverbial princess, and he's only got an hour in which to do it. You'll run from room to room, executing tricky jumps, climbing up and down ledges, hacking at dungeon guards with a sword, stepping on pressure plates to open exit doors and open and close gates, and dodging such obstacles as spikes, chasms, slicers, poisonous potions, moving platforms, crumbling floors, and multistory falls. When you go from one room to the next the screen briefly goes black and you suddenly appear in the next room. Unlike other versions the NES game scrolls just a little to the right and left. The game is challenging, so you'll definitely need those passwords for saving your progress.

Notable Quotable:

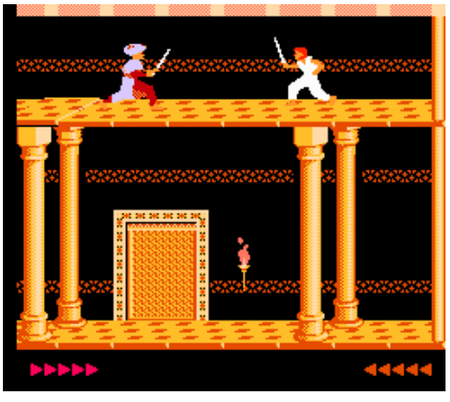
"Full of action and suspense, with puzzles to keep you scratching your head for some time to come." —*N-Force* (January 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"This is not a fast, flying, running-and-leaping sort of quest, no; instead, every step must be carefully calculated, every move made gingerly . . . This system of carefully traversing the environment forms the crux of *Prince of Persia*. You may love it or hate it, but this is what you get. All bets are placed on this concept of careful, intelligent level beating. But while the physical traversing of elements is prime, so too is deft swordplay, memorization as to which potions are helpful or harmful, and even some points that require blind leaps of faith, or other areas that require trial-and-error tactics to avoid cheap deaths . . . executed with a unique sense of style and mechanical bravado . . . a decent, fun effort, and a departure from the usual parade of licensed platformers and other retreads." —Eric Bailey (formerly at www.examiner.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The platforming in this game requires a lot of precision and the default movement is the opposite of precise . . . The jump controls are also a little weird and take some getting used to . . . I've never had such a problem performing a running jump in a game. It was maddening . . . The levels aren't very large, but they also aren't linear . . . It can be frustrating to reach the exit and find you need to backtrack to find the plate that opens the door . . . It does require some memorization, as time can easily tick away as you have to backtrack or restart the level because the controls suck . . . the NES port is not one of the better ones . . . the story bits which are featured in other versions are totally absent here . . . The music is repetitive and gets grating after a while. There is at least an option to turn it off. The sound effects are clunky, especially when you do things like run into walls, which you'll probably do a lot . . . Though the character models look pretty good, the dungeon background gets boring really quick . . . It's not a game I'll be going back to anytime soon." —Cannot be Tamed (YouTube)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Princess Tomato in the Salad Kingdom

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Graphic Adventure; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

In *Princess Tomato in the Salad Kingdom* the titular red fruit (not vegetable) has been kidnapped by the evil Minister Pumpkin, and it is up to Sir Cucumber, a Knight of the Realm, to rescue her, restore King Broccoli to the throne, and bring peace to the formerly blissful Salad Kingdom. The fanciful setting of the game will appeal to younger gamers while the old school gameplay—read text, click on commands to interact with surroundings, view static imagery, acquire items to solve puzzles, and walk around in first-person, mazelike caves—will resonate with those who recall the early days of personal computer adventure games. There are 14 commands from which to choose: move, look, check, talk, take, use, give, buy, hit, fight, praise, dump, item, and Percy, which is asking your partner Percy for suggestions on what to do. Battles take the form of "finger wars," which are basically games of rock/paper/scissors. The trial-and-error gameplay can get tedious, but the unusual (for this genre), semicharming theme of the game, which predated the *Veggie Tales* franchise by several years, does set it apart. If you've never heard of this game that's because it is obscure and very hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"Definitely one of the weirdest RPGs to ever be made. The story is not of your typical nature and goals are equally strange. The graphics, which are displayed in detailed windows, are a cool twist, but this RPG won't blow away anyone who has played similar fare." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"With a garden-fresh storyline and totally organic cast of characters, this adventure is made to order for players who are better at using brainpower than dazzling dexterity! Clever clues are ripe for the picking, and when you engage the enemy a quick wit beats fast reflexes." —*Nintendo Power* (March 1991)

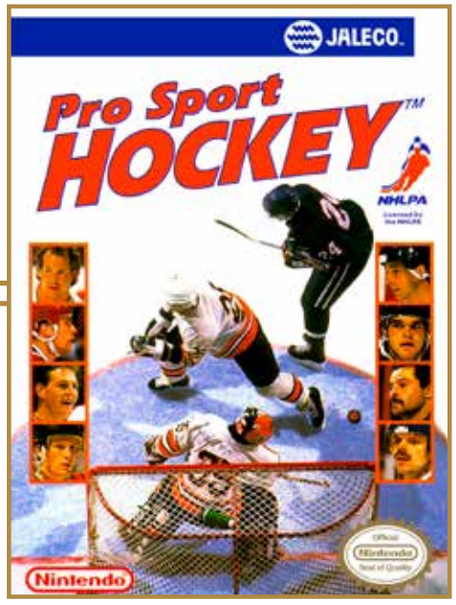
Notable Quotable:

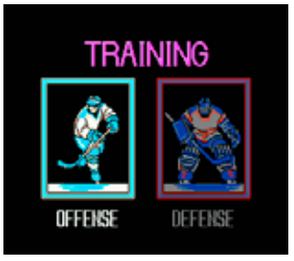
"The graphical adventure genre was huge on Famicom in Japan, but it never found much traction on NES in the West. The handful of those games to actually make their way to the US stand out all the more for their scarcity, and none manages to be quite so memorable as Hudson's incredibly bizarre *Princess Tomato in the Salad Kingdom* . . . The usual adventure game logic rules here, so there's a fair amount of second guessing the puzzles or just using brute force to work through every possible menu command. Despite these flaws it's unique (and amusingly written) enough to hold up 30 years later." —Polygon (www.polygon.com), which ranked *Princess Tomato in the Salad Kingdom* the 32nd-greatest NES game

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pro Sport Hockey

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Hockey; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.





A solid game that is harder to find than most sports titles for the NES, *Pro Sport Hockey* lets gamers select from 24 teams, each of which has 12 real NHL players thanks to NHLPA licensing. Each team is rated according to speed, shot speed, quickness, defense, and power. There are three modes of arcade-like play: Super Cup (a seven-game series), Exhibition, and Training. On offense players can aim the puck, but if the goal is in sight the puck will automatically travel toward the goal no matter what direction the player is facing. Holding the button down creates a more powerful shot. On defense players can check, stick check, and select auto or manual goalie control. Several features can be turned on or off, including offsides, overtime, icing, and penalties, the last of which consists of hooking, tripping, elbowing, and charging. The vertical rink is viewed from an overhead perspective and it scrolls to follow the action.

Notable Quotable:

"If you're really desperate for a fun 8-bit hockey product Konami's *Blades of Steel* is the only way to skate. *Pro Sport Hockey* is a good buy—only if you're looking to use an NES cartridge as a hockey puck." —*GamePro* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"This is proof that if you do top-down the right way it can actually work. The rink looks pretty detailed. There are a lot of nice little cutscenes . . . nice different colors for each team . . . You feel real clunky while you're trying to skate, and you build up this odd momentum that should be fine, but the rink feels way too confined, so by the time you speed up you just run into the goal or into the boards." —Drink a Beer and Play a Game (YouTube)

Insider Insight: *Ice Hockey* and *Blades of Steel* get all the love when it comes to NES hockey games, but *Pro Sport Hockey* is the only game on the console that sports an NHL Players Association license, and thus the only one with real NHL players. It's a special title for that reason alone. Published by Jaleco, the same brand responsible for the *Bases Loaded* series, it's just as memorable of a game, even if it never earned a sequel or nearly as much fanfare.

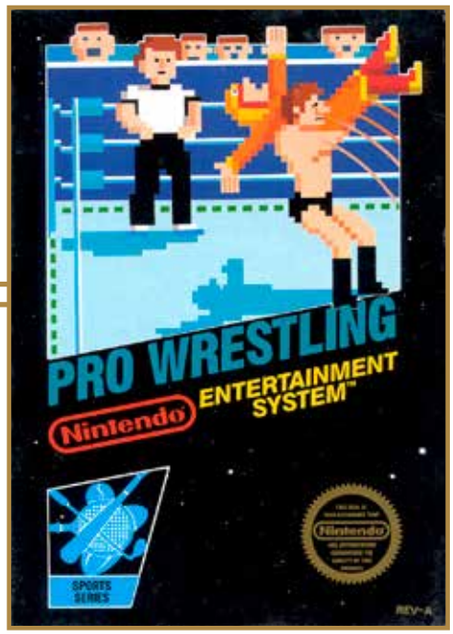
Regardless of flying under the radar, *Pro Sport Hockey* is also noteworthy because it sports a top-down view, similar to such games as *NHL '94* and *Mutant League Hockey*, two of the coolest hockey games on the 16-bit Genesis. The fact that this game even runs on the system is an achievement in itself.

Released within a year of EA's two now-iconic hockey games and near the end of the NES lifespan, *Pro Sport Hockey* didn't have much of a fan base, as many gamers had already upgraded consoles. Regardless, just like the aforementioned Genesis games, it has a solid sense of speed and plays well. Flickering, a lack of authentic team colors, and only a handful of player animations probably hurt *Pro Sport Hockey*'s overall appeal, but it is still the fastest, most professionally coherent version of the sport on the NES. Admittedly it isn't as much fun as *Ice Hockey* or *Blades of Steel*, but homebrewers have continued to update the game's rosters, making it remain playable today. —Patrick Hickey Jr., author of *The Minds Behind the Games*, founder and editor in chief of ReviewFix.com

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pro Wrestling

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: TRY.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Wrestling; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.



The second wrestling game for the NES, *Pro Wrestling* offers enjoyably simple gameplay and nice visual detail, including a referee, a cameraman, and an animated crowd. There are six selectable wrestlers from which to choose, each with fairly similar wrestling moves and each with one or two unique special moves. Playable characters include judo expert Fighter Hyabusa (back brain kick); super space-traveler Starman (somersault kick, flying cross chop); living karate tool Kin Corn Karn (Mongolian chop, karate kick); ultimate human weapon Giant Panther (iron claw, head butt); half-piranha, half-man The Amazon (piranha bite, outlaw choke); and cold-blooded warrior King Slender (back breaker). Players engage in a series of five-minute matches, culminating in a fight against the mysterious Great Puma, a.k.a. "the perfect wrestler." Throws, top-of the-ring jumps, and fighting outside the ring are all part of the fun. When wrestling another gamer it's a two-out-of-three fall match with no time limit—the first wrestler to pin his opponent twice wins.

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

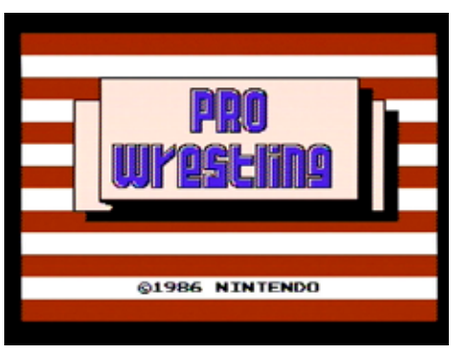
Notable Quotable:
"This old cartridge still offers maniacal fun! It'll take you a while to learn all the moves. Good animation." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics are plain, sound OK'ish, and play is pretty mediocre. This is not a bad game; it just fails to grab your attention or enthusiasm." —*Computer and Video Games* (September 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"Sold like gangbusters and ultimately led the way for the wrestling game explosion still in full force today . . . has passed the test of time with flying colors." —*Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked *Pro Wrestling* the 79th-greatest game of all time

Notable Quotable:
"*Pro Wrestling* is just one step away from smelly armpits and old grannies shouting 'PULL HIS EARS OFF' . . . a huge range of different moves . . . The best bit is where you throw the bloke out of the ring, dive out of the ring while he's still down, stamp on his head, and leap back in the ring again . . . Although it's a bit hard, this is fun. Played as a two-player game it's loads of laughs" —*Advanced Computer Entertainment* (January 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"A little more serious than most of the wrestling games we've played lately. The characters are fanciful enough, such as The Amazon who is 'half piranha, half man,' but the game is not played for laughs . . . plays very well and offers a lot of variety without making the act of controlling the fighters too complicated . . . Graphically *Pro Wrestling* is quite realistic and well-animated, with large fighting figures so you can really see what moves are being executed. —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1987)



Insider Insight: *Pro Wrestling* caught my eye early on in the NES life cycle. The front box art is an excellent representation of the look and feel of the real wrestling action, characters, and special moves, with the glaring exception of "who the hell is that wrestler with the red-and-yellow boots and mask?!?!" There is no character in the game who looks like that, which is confusing, since the actual wrestlers in the game were likely programmed by the time the box art was commissioned for drawing. As kids we all assumed that is what the game's final wrestler, Great Puma, looked like, since none of us could actually reach him to find out. However, the wonder of the internet has proven that theory to be wrong. Whoever he is, he looks pretty cool in contrast to the box cover's other wrestler, Fighter Hayabusa. With his generic black boots and black wrestling trunks there's nothing about him that stands out. Regardless of the misleading cover art, the box alone was enough to sell me on *Pro Wrestling*'s charms since it ended up being one of the first games I asked for when I got my NES for Christmas in 1987. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

Insider Insight: When the NES was first released I purchased just about every game available, but I played *Pro Wrestling* more than any of the others. Maybe it was the cheesy intro music, or the two-player combat that predated *Street Fighter II* by a few years. Whatever the case, my friends and I couldn't get enough. We each had a favorite character—mine was Kin Korn Karn. We would discuss moves and matches, even during school.

There was one match in particular that lives in infamy. My younger brother Jason had mastered Fighter Hyabusa. He was unbeatable. Stupid flying leg kick to the back of the head. He went undefeated for weeks. Then my friend Don finally had him on the ropes. His fighter, Starman, tossed Hyabusa out of the ring. He was finished! Then, inexplicably, Starman took a running leap and jumped out of the ring to finish him off. But somehow Hyabusa got up just before impact and Starman landed face first. Hyabusa managed to crawl back into the ring before the bell. Jason and his bionic thumbs would go on to remain undefeated. But that didn't stop us from trying.

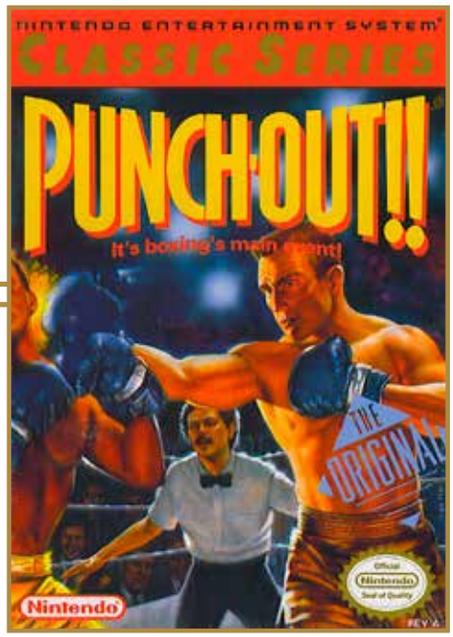
On prom night, instead of going out to a party afterwards, we headed back home to play *Pro Wrestling*. Our dates weren't thrilled, even after we explained how important it was to beat the bastard Hyabusa. We couldn't rest until he was dethroned! But alas, rest would not come because Jason had what we called "motor finger," meaning he was really fast at pressing buttons. This combined with a strange psychic connection with that character made sure we never did triumph over Hyabusa.

I went on to open my own chain of game stores in the '90s called Electronic Adventure, which became Game Express, on Long Island. I've since retired from selling games, but whenever my old friends and I get together with my brother, no matter what the occasion, someone eventually says "rematch" and it's game on. The rivalry will never cease—some day we will beat Hyabusa! —Stevan Mena, writer, director (www.stevanmena.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Punch-Out!!

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D3.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Boxing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



Punch-Out!! is the same game as *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*, but a character named Mr. Dream replaces Tyson. Contrary to popular belief the title change wasn't due to Tyson's rape arrest or his loss to Buster Douglas. Rather, it was because Nintendo's license to use the famous boxer's likeness and name had expired (mercifully, one might add, considering Tyson's troubles). You fight as Little Mac, a 107-pound, 17-year-old underdog from the Bronx. He must box 10 colorful opponents before facing Mike Tyson himself, including Glass Joe (France's Glass Jaw), Von Kaiser (The German Steel Machine), King Hippo (Tropical Chief), and Soda Popinksi. It takes strategy and technique to win each fight, as opposed to simple button mashing. Each boxer has an energy meter that decreases with every hit taken. When a boxer's energy meter is emptied they hit the canvas. If a boxer is knocked down three times in one round it's a technical knockout (traditional knockouts are possible as well). Little Mac can block, duck, and dodge left and right, and he can hit boxers in the face and execute body blows. If he has a star, which is earned by catching the opponent off guard, he can deliver a powerful uppercut. When Little Mac gets hit or has a punch blocked he loses a heart. When he runs out of hearts he gets weak and cannot punch, so he must dodge punches to gain his strength back. Press A rapidly if he gets knocked down so he will get back up. The perspective is from behind Little Mac, but he is short, giving you a good view of the action. In Nintendo's original arcade game of the same name (1984) your boxer is a translucent green.

Memories: While I acknowledge that *Punch-Out!!* is objectively a quality title, I never really warmed up to it. I spent a lot more time playing *Rocky Super Action Boxing* for the ColecoVision and *Boxing* for the Atari 2600, which I readily admit are inferior games from a technical and strategical standpoint. My favorite boxing game of all time is *Ready 2 Rumble* for the PlayStation.

Notable Quotable:

"There is a short list of fighters, but the game length and difficulty seem just right. The graphics are dated, but still perfect for the game. The character 'Mr. Dream' they replaced Iron Mike with after the license expired is very generic, very white, and very lame—but even that version of the game remains just as enjoyable. It simply seems like the stars were aligned when this title came out, and it showcases the kind of quirky, fundamentally enjoyable games Nintendo would become famous for. It's a wonderful mix of challenge, simplicity, humor, and fun that all games should aspire to . . . Absolutely flawless." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Insider Insight: The original *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* is not only my favorite NES game, it's my favorite all-time video game, period. So what to make of its Tyson-less revision from 1990, issued three years after the original? Apart from Iron Mike being replaced as World Champion by the generic "Mr. Dream" the two games are identical. Mr. Dream may look different (he's a white guy with a flattop haircut), but fighting-wise he's a Tyson clone. So while *Punch-Out!!* is great simply by virtue of replicating *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*, if you own a working copy of the latter there really isn't much reason to also acquire the former.

But purchase *Punch-Out!!* I did, because by 1990 my original *Mike Tyson* game cartridge barely flickered on, no matter how much I blew on the connectors. For the next year or so, until getting a SNES (at which point I mostly set the NES aside), if I ever wanted to fight through the World Video Boxing Association as Little Mac, *Punch-Out!!* was the only way to do it. Ultimately, as an adult, I re-acquired a functional copy of *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*, and once again had little use for the remake. But I'm certainly glad *Punch-Out!!* was there in the interim.—Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Punisher

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

Frank Castle was once a family man, ex-marine, and police investigator, but after his wife and kids fell victim to a mob hit he became the vengeful Punisher, a skull-chested vigilante with a penchant for killing criminals. In this game players maneuver the Marvel Comics antihero, who is viewed from behind, left and right along the bottom of an automatically scrolling playfield (which moves left to right), aiming a cursor around the screen while shooting at thugs, hoods, and felons. Other targets include background objects and such comic book criminals as Hitman (who flies around in a helicopter) and the Kingpin (who must be defeated in hand-to-hand combat). The Punisher is armed with an automatic machine pistol and grenades and can pick up an automatic assault rifle, a rocket launcher, and a Kevlar vest. The action takes place in the streets of New York City, and Punisher can take alternate routes by entering the subway, manholes, and doorways. The Punisher and the cursor move in unison, making for a somewhat awkward control scheme, but holding in the A button while pressing the d-pad does give the cursor independent movement. Not bad for an 8-bit comic book game.

Memories: I never actually owned *The Punisher*, but my friend Johnny Loyd had the game at his house. He was (and is) much more of a movie fan and comic book and action figure collector than he is a gamer, but he did have an NES and Sega Genesis with a few games for each. He collected only superhero and sci-fi movie games (against my advisement), meaning he was uninterested in such superior titles as *Super Mario Bros. 3* and *Streets of Rage*. This also meant that *The Punisher* was one of the better games in his collection.

Notable Quotable:

"In my childhood *The Punisher* was my first taste of what would later establish a love for light gun and first person shooters alike. Ironically this title is neither. It takes the crosshair light gun motif I first saw in *Operation Wolf* and adapts it into a third person shooter (without light gun) that integrated upgrades and even brawler elements to an otherwise rote shooter title . . . I loved this flawed, aggressive shooter . . . I was quite impressed with the graphical prowess, the amount of enemies on screen." —Fred Rojas (gaminghistory101.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Though relatively common now, the massive amount of environment damage you can perform here was impressive for its time. Nearly every single thing you see on the screen can be deformed in some way, from shooting out windows, to marking the walls and streets with bullet holes. Your enemies use these backgrounds to their advantage as well, popping out of windows, rolling out from alleys, hiding behind boxes . . . The graphics are really pretty impressive and the lighting almost atmospheric. It's no comic book, but it uses some of the same ideas. Shades of blues and purples give the idea of neon and city streets at night. The indoor and sewer areas look a bit worse and suffer from basic walls that lack much detail . . . The different combinations of enemies and patterns will likely get repetitive by the end of the game, but keep things interesting and unpredictable, at least for the first few missions . . . Sound is an interesting point, as there is virtually none. There are a few themes at the beginning and during boss fights, but in the levels all you will hear are the sounds of gunfire." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Insider Insight: When I saw *The Punisher* resting on the shelf of our local Petro Canada gas station my imagination ran wild with what a game starring the gun-toting anti-hero could look like. Imagine *Contra*, but instead of jungle environments and mountains the battle arena is the streets of New York, filled with disease-ridden lowlife scum, and the bullets emptied from Frank Castle's arsenal are the only cure. However, upon eyeballing the back of the box I saw something unexpected.

Instead of a side-scrolling run-and-gun action game, *The Punisher* was a simple shooter where the title character had his back turned to the player, obscuring his iconic skull logo from view. Even for a Punisher fan who was hungry for new Nintendo games and easily tricked by a slick license, this take on the character was something I didn't think I could enjoy.

Many years later, when I started reviewing comic book-related video games, I discovered that I was too harsh on *The Punisher*. As I gathered from the few screenshots on the back of the package it is an on-rails shooter, but it has a few clever ideas to keep it from being mindless. The major one being that in addition to navigating a cursor to quickly shoot enemies you can also move Frank left and right across the screen when not firing. This added an unexpected layer of complexity, as you have to be mindful of your position onscreen. Some of the boss encounters play out like the bouts found in *Punch-Out!!*, and if not for some spotty collision detection in these battles *The Punisher* could almost be considered a hidden gem.

It's funny how opinions can change. In the early '90s I scoffed at *The Punisher*, but now I'm credited as one of the positive reviews on the game's Wikipedia page. —Blair Farrell, owner and content generator for Comic Gamers Assemble, author of *The Web of Spider-Man Games: The Amazing and the (Not So) Spectacular*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Puss N Boots—Pero's Great Adventure

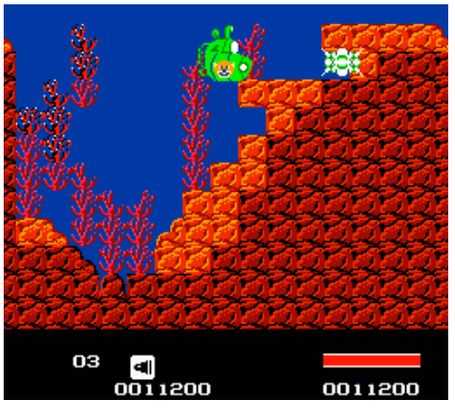
PUBLISHER: Electro Brain.
DEVELOPER: Shouei System.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/ Side-Scrolling Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

If you enjoyed the animation, cute graphics, diversity, and feline protagonist of *Felix the Cat* for the NES you might like *Puss N Boots*, in which Pero the Cat gets sent back through time and across the world by Count Gruemon for committing the Cat Kingdom crime of befriending a mouse. As Pero you must locate and defeat Grueman and the mad Dr. Gari-gari and use their time machine to get home. Much of the game plays like a traditional platformer, with Pero running, jumping, and battling his way through The West (as in Old West), London, and New York. His weapons include a pistol, bombs, and a boomerang. However, four of the game's seven stages—The Ocean, Arabia, Space Wars, and Liberty—put Pero at the helm of a vehicle, such as a submarine, a car, an airplane, or a hot air balloon, firing missiles, a machine gun, and/or torpedoes. Enemies and obstacles to deal with include barrels, shooting stars, sharks, pirate ships, buzzards, jellyfish, submarines, bounding balls, and airplanes among others. Loosely based on Toei Animation's 1976 anime film *Puss 'n Boots: Around the World in 80 Days*, which in turn was inspired by Jules Verne's classic science fiction novel, *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

Notable Quotable:
"This is both an incredibly strange game and an unjustifiably short one. How short? It can literally be beaten in around 15 minutes . . . It has decent shooting mechanics, but stiff platforming in the final levels . . . it is such a strange game that you want to keep playing just to see what happens next." —Jack Tolzmann (www.consolealliance.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The game unabashedly panders to the same young audience that the animated film was marketed toward, and the graphics, while certainly not of the same quality as their inspiration, are pleasant and inoffensive, being clear and colorful (though at times suffer from their excessive simplicity). There are many 'cute' touches, like the animal face on the side of the submarine, or the killer cats wearing uniforms that wouldn't look out of place at a Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace . . . as simple, easy, and straightforward as one would expect from a game geared toward elementary school-aged children; the levels are rather sparsely populated with enemies and the few that Pero encounters can be defeated with minimal effort . . . the music in *Puss N Boots* never rises above sheer mediocrity." —NintendoComplete.Com (www.nintendocomplete.com)

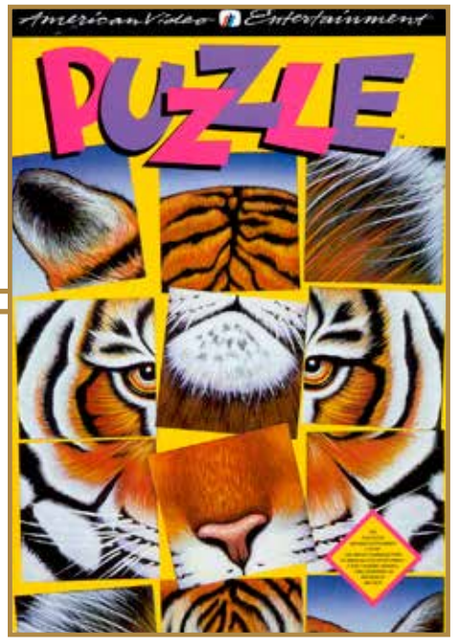
Notable Quotable:
"In perhaps skewing for a younger audience the developers aimed way below the mark, with level design dominated by long stretches of walking or riding in a vehicle with absolutely no enemies, bottomless pits, or onscreen dangers of any kind . . . a final boss that is disproportionately difficult . . . Some enemies take more than one hit to kill and could possibly ram you if you didn't destroy them in time . . . except that when they get too close they make your life easier *by jumping over you*, even if it's a *damn pirate ship* . . . While the vehicle stages are barren, the walking stages have no shortage of background objects, which is why it's so peculiar that they look amateurish. The drabness is augmented by the arrangement of buildings, et al, into block patterns with obvious right angles. In contrast the music is profoundly competent, with the highlight being a rockin' 'Game Over' theme. The soundtrack was composed by Mitsuyasu Tomohisa of the popular Japanese rock band Jaywalk." —Flying Omelette (www.flyingomelette.com)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Puzzle

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Idea-Tek.
GAME TYPE: Jigsaw Puzzle; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



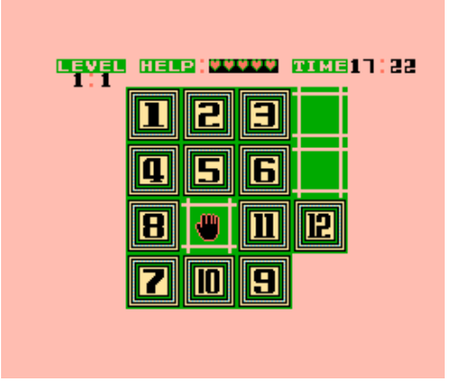
Similar to those old school sliding puzzle games where you shift plastic tiles to form a picture, *Puzzle* features a variety of different images for you to configure, including a tiger, a dog, a castle, the Statue of Liberty, the Golden Gate Bridge, Yosemite Valley, and Mount Rushmore. After you select a puzzle the computer scrambles the picture and you must reassemble it. If you need help, you can press a button (up to five times) to see what the finished puzzle will look like. You can also challenge the computer to a dice game or a round of rock/paper/scissors. This will cost you 60 seconds on the timer, but if you win you will get a bonus move allowing you to exchange any two pieces. There are eight standard puzzles for you to solve, plus two expert bonus puzzles. While *Puzzle* is about as basic as it gets on the NES, there is variety, in that pieces are randomly configured each time you play. This exceedingly simplistic game is unlicensed and fairly hard to find. In addition to being released individually, *Puzzle* was one of the 15 games in *Max 15*.

Notable Quotable:

"For a game that lacks any sort of creative vision it's actually quite playable and, dare I say, enjoyable . . . As part of a 15-game compilation *Puzzle* succeeded as a decent diversion. As a standalone game it feels bereft of content, and frankly, a little old-fashioned."
—Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

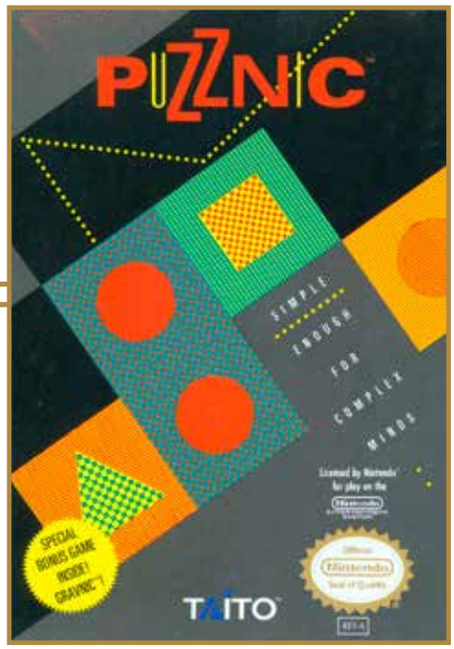
"Very easy to learn and play . . . The difficulty of the game starts pretty low but gets higher later on. This not only happens because of the increase of tiles, but also because of the reduction of available time and the fact it is hard to see where which part of the picture should go . . . The picture doesn't even look that great. This could have, and should have, been improved on . . . The sound is a bit better than this game's graphics, but not by much. You'll hear very little variation in the in-game music and the music you hear makes you wish you had muted the television. Luckily you can turn off the music in the main screen."
—GameFaqs (gamefaqs.gamespot.com)

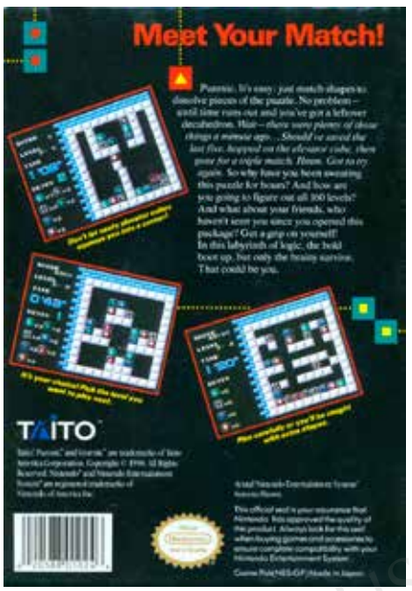


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Puzznic

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Taito.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.





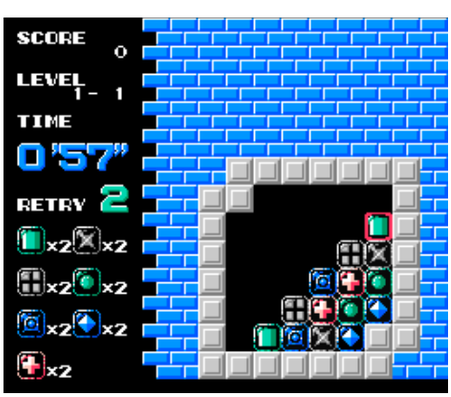
A solid adaptation of Taito's 1989 arcade game, which was a possible inspiration for *Tetris Attack*, *Puzznic* has you guiding a cursor around the screen and using it to move blocks of varying colors and designs, including cubes, diamonds, grids, plusses, spheres, and pyramids. You can only move a block left and right, but gravity makes it go downward when it is positioned above an empty space. A block can only move upward by riding an elevator block. The objective is to clear the screen by making blocks touch. By creating several matches with just one move you can earn reaction bonus points. There are 16 levels, each containing 10 timed puzzles. If you get stuck you have the option to try again a few times or continue. The game will thoroughly please most action puzzle fans thanks to good controls, smooth difficulty progression, and devious challenges—odd numbers of blocks frequently force players to make three blocks disappear at once. However, the overall simplicity may turn off some hardcore puzzle junkies. The repetitious music, which is energetic and all over the place, will entertain some gamers but annoy others. Adding to the value of the package is a separate but related game called *Gravnic*, in which you must move all the shapes one at a time by shifting their gravity. Each puzzle must be solved in several moves, creating a difficult but delectable gaming experience. Unfortunately the cartridge is hard to find.

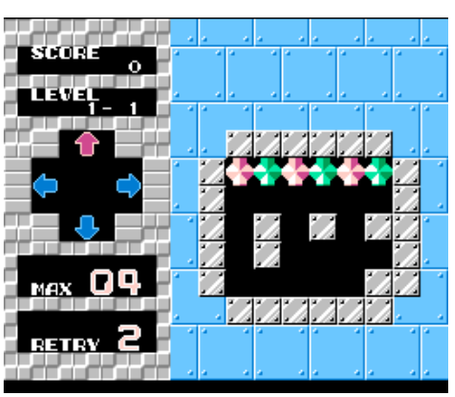
Notable Quotable:

"I really liked *Puzznic*, but some of the puzzles are pretty tough. I also hate the timer in some of the situations as well. But hey, that's what passwords and game help guides are for. If you want something to stimulate your mind instead of your reflexes then *Puzznic* might be your game." —Neko Random (linkrandom.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Taito has a long history of making excellent arcade games, and this console adaptation of one of their puzzlers is a ton of fun. Sliding tiles across its stages with gravity in place while making matches to completely clear each stage is a lot trickier than it looks. If you want a more modern version then be sure to play the PS1 release, which features a cast of cute anime characters." —A. J. Maciejewski (videochums.com), who ranked *Puzznic* the sixth-best NES puzzle game

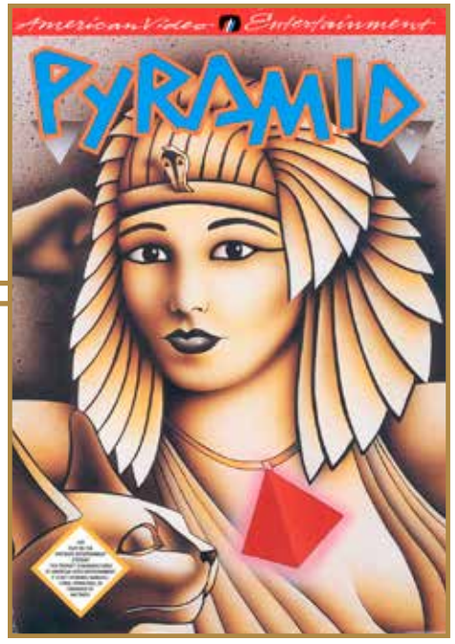




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Pyramid

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Sachen.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



A falling block puzzler obviously inspired by *Tetris*, *Pyramid* has players rotating and strategically fitting together stones that fall down the screen (one at a time), trying to form solid lines to make the stones disappear. There are five stone types of varying shapes and sizes, each containing some component(s) of a triangle and/or a square. Completing two lines simultaneously rewards players with a bomb, which is useful when the screen gets crowded. If the stones pile to the top the game will end. While *Pyramid* plays a lot like *Tetris* the shapes are more angular, giving it unique challenges of its own. Unlicensed and fairly hard to find, *Pyramid* has the coolest title screen of any puzzle game on the NES.

Notable Quotable:

"While the Sphinx backdrop is cool looking, and the music has a puz-tacular feel, the game essentially asks you to play *Tetris*, yet provides askew shapes that rarely fit together. The designers recognized this and thoughtfully give you five bombs that you can use at random to blow chunks out of the pieces. I suppose when your game is shot to hell explosions are always the answer." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"*Pyramid* reveals a new angle on the tetromino dropping that was *Tetris*, yet it manages none of the spontaneity and even manages to get a few basic things wrong. If you enjoy geometry puzzles it certainly takes time to figure how to get around the game's flaws. Strategies are extracted, not discovered with a flash . . . The game will appeal only to a niche of puzzle fans, and if they are smart enough to be any good at it, they'll recognize just how flawed it is." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

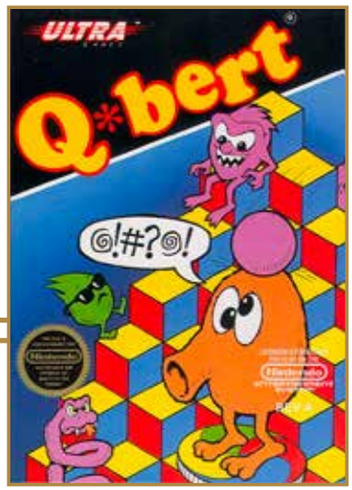
Notable Quotable:

"The tragedy here is that *Pyramid* could have been a really cool game. With some tweaks to the soundtrack, a more robust scoring system, another play mode or two, and some intentional changes to the pieces this honestly could have been a very solid puzzle game. The basic idea is superb: *Tetris*, but making the player deal with both angled faces and flat faces, thus adding a whole 'nother layer of depth to the gameplay and strategy. Unfortunately the execution is bumpy here, and *Pyramid* is doomed to a life spent as a curiosity and a relic." —Eric Bailey (nintendolegend.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Q*bert

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer/Action Puzzle; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1989.



When *Q*bert* was released for the NES, the simple four-way control and nonscrolling playfield seemed outdated to many fans of such epic titles as *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda*. However, the game was still fun (and funny), with players guiding the iconic, hose-nosed creature as it hops on the blocks of a pyramid. Jumping on a block changes its color, and Q*bert must hop on every block (thereby making all the block colors the same) to progress to the next pyramid, which has the same structural design as the previous one. Later levels force players to change the color of each square twice. While Q*bert does his job Ugg, Wrong-Way, Coily the snake, and Slick and Sam (who change squares back to their original color) get in the way. Hopping off the pyramid is lethal unless it's on to a disc that transports Q*bert to the top of the pyramid. The original arcade version, which Gottlieb released in 1982, has crisper graphics and better controls. The coin-op classic, which inspired a cartoon and lots of merchandise, also has superior sound effects, including a pinball machine knocker that would go off inside the cabinet when Q*bert jumped off the pyramid and the iconic garbled "cursing" sound Q*bert made when hit by an enemy. Both versions offer the visual text bubble, "@!#?@!" The NES game features two different control schemes (with a little tutorial), each of which works reasonably well. Unfortunately, as soon as your game is over the screen turns black and offers you the options of "end" or "continue," but without displaying your final score. This is a big no-no for a port of a classic arcade game.

Memories: I loved *Q*bert* in the arcades and was pretty decent at it, but I could never reach the lofty levels of one Gilbert Deluna, a high school friend of mine. He could play seemingly forever on one quarter at the Putt-Putt Golf & Games I would frequent as a teenager (and once snuck out to until 5:00 a.m. on a school night). I was happy when the early home versions came out for the Atari 2600 and ColecoVision so I could practice and get better at the game (yes, the skills did transfer surprisingly well). The more accurate (though still imperfect) NES version came out two years after I got my console and was a welcome addition to the collection.

Notable Quotable:
"Even though it's just a simple arcade puzzler, *Q*bert* has managed to stand the test of time and proves to be another great NES port of a coin-op classic. There's enough challenging, addictive action to satisfy anyone looking for a nice arcade fix. Kudos to Konami for providing this excellent conversion." —NES Times (formerly at www.nestimes.net)

Notable Quotable:
"Yes, Konami's version of *Q*bert* is true to the arcades, but just like the coin-op it is too repetitive and has only one screen. Like all the other versions this one has sloppy controls, too. This may have been cute in '84, but today's games need more than the same screen with little variety." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"The characters are silly, and indeed the whole game seems loony, but it's as irresistible as ever . . . We found the original Nintendo control pad ideal for this game, even though we often use a joystick with our Nintendo system. We had a lot of fun with *Q*bert*, which has always been one of our favorite coin-op games." —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1989)

Insider Insight: *Q*Bert* has had a special place in my heart since even before the Nintendo Entertainment System was a thing. The Atari 2600 port of Gottlieb's 1982 arcade classic was one of the first games I ever received as a gift and literally my first video game. I was staying with my grandparents while my mother was in the hospital giving birth to my little brother. In what is absolutely one of my happiest childhood memories my grandmother took me to Sears, where she purchased *Q*Bert* and *Ms. Pac-Man* to keep me entertained during my stay (no doubt both games were substantially discounted because of the video game crash). While the Atari 2600 port of *Q*Bert* was far from arcade-perfect, it entertained me amply, and the character Q*bert became the first video game mascot that I remember being a fan of—I even watched the Saturday morning cartoon!

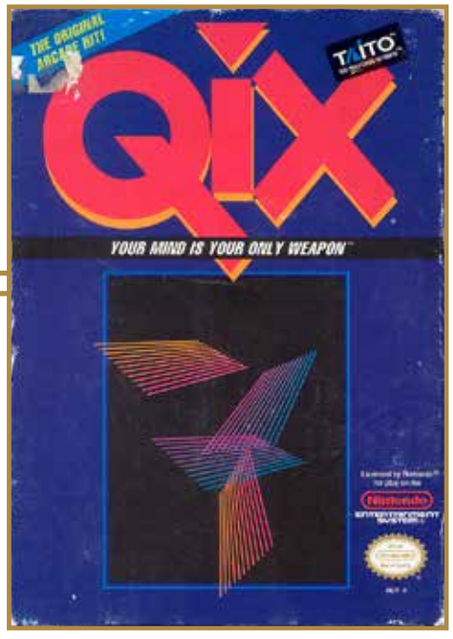
Over the years the game was ported to just about every platform imaginable, but it wasn't until the game was released on the NES in 1989 that fans finally had a nearly pixel-perfect home port that included many features often missing altogether from earlier releases. It even has customizable controls (something virtually unheard of in NES games) to accommodate the game's diagonal orientation. I was ecstatic when I got the game for Christmas in 1991 and immediately cherished it. It was even better than I remembered it through childhood nostalgia, and even now, almost three decades later, it remains one of the NES carts that I fire up most often.

More recently, my love of *Q*Bert* was forever assured in summer 2018 when I actually had the opportunity to meet the game's co-creator, Warren Davis, in person and spend time chatting with him one-on-one all about *Q*Bert* and game development in general. It's not every day you get to meet one of your heroes in such proximity and learn to appreciate something you've always loved at an even greater level! @!#?@! —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Qix

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Novotrade International.
GAME TYPE: Maze; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1991.



You use a diamond-shaped marker to draw lines in *Qix* (pronounced "kicks"), an action maze game. As you draw, filling in the screen with boxes, rectangles, and other straight-line shapes, enemies in the form of Qix (an undulating, fan-shaped computer virus), Spritz (star-shaped objects), and Sparx make things difficult. You should make sure the Qix and the Spritz don't touch the Stix (the line being drawn) and that the Qix, Spritz, and Sparx don't touch the marker. If you stop in mid-draw a fuse can burn up the Stix, destroying the marker. The board ends when you fill in 75 percent or more of the screen, but you want to fill in as much as possible. You can draw fast and slow, the latter garnering more points for each percentage point completed. Trapping the Qix and Spritz while filling in space also scores extra points. After a few stages two Qix appear onscreen, making the game more difficult, but giving you a new strategy to beat the round: splitting the two Qix. Based on Taito's 1981 arcade game, NES *Qix* (not to be confused with Nesquik) added a computer virus storyline, textured designs, and the aforementioned Spritz.

Memories: I was mesmerized by *Qix* in the arcades and thoroughly enjoyed it. I watched fascinated as disciples of the game drew elaborate patterns—most notably narrow towers up the center of the screen—so they could close off a big chunk of the playfield with one final quick line, closing in more than 90 percent of the playfield and scoring tons of points in the process. I watched and learned and used this skill at home when playing the game on my Atari 5200 and later NES.

Insider Insight: Video games have gotten really complicated. *Qix* is the kick-in-the-antithesis of all that.

It's as if the flesh was ripped off of all other games, revealing the internal mechanics of the entire industry. Sounds salacious, sure, but there's never been a game more nude than *Qix*.

Consider its core conceit, which is, super fundamentally, about mathematical completion. Whereas other games conceal these simple facts of progress, in hopes that you'll stay steadfastly hunting for secret warps and elusive gems, *Qix* is your only honest friend that cares enough to acknowledge the booger dangling precariously from your nostril.

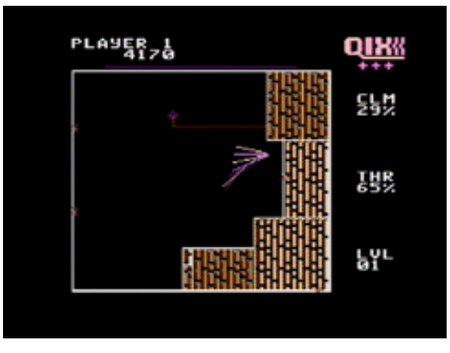
I hated math as a kid, but *Qix* tricked me into understanding game design. The goal of each level was basic enough, but the challenge curve was a real beast. 62 percent is a stroll in the park, but 84 percent is a kamikaze run.

Today, games outwardly count total hours committed, as if time sunk were the measure of anything. *Qix* has confidence in its simplicity, like the house in Vegas against you, a husband awake at 4:31 AM, drunkenly gambling away your family's rent money at the blackjack table.

You've gotta respect a game that lets it all hang out, knowing that human nature, when denied victory, is to try and try and desperately try again.

The old adage is wrong. Life (and/or game design) isn't a destination. Nor is it a journey. It's just about a percentage of completion, and it's *Qix* that taught me that.

—Jon M. Gibson, Co-Owner/Co-Creative Director of iam8bit (iam8bit.com)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Quattro Adventure

PUBLISHER: Camerica.
DEVELOPER: Codemasters.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Game Compilation/ Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

This unlicensed compilation cartridge collects four previously unreleased action/adventure/platform games. *Linus Spacehead* finds a caped alien adventurer floating on bubbles to avoid rocks and sea creatures, running on a beach while dodging falling coconuts and the like. In *Super Robin Hood*, which is the only game in the collection to give the protagonist a weapon, the mythical antihero collects treasures and keys, climbs ladders, jumps on moving platforms, dodges spikes and projectiles, and shoots arrows at bats and other enemies. The titular boy in *Boomerang Kid*, which features single-screen levels, collects (but doesn't throw) boomerangs while performing such activities as jumping on platforms (cliffs, trees, and the like) and avoiding snakes and koalas. In *Treasure Island Dizzy*, the egg-shaped star of *The Fantastic Adventures of Dizzy* explores a tree house village, gold mines, a dragon's lair, and other areas while using items and encountering wizards, trolls, leprechauns, and other strange creatures. These games are playable but could certainly use some polishing, especially with the controls. *Quattro Adventure* was released in a standard version as well as a compact cartridge format that requires the Aladdin Deck Enhancer.

Notable Quotable:

"*Quattro Adventure* has four reasonably playable games, with Dizzy coming up trumps once more. Get your hands on a four pack today. This is what the NES has been waiting for!" —*N-Force* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The majority of the *Quattro Adventure* games could easily stand by themselves. *Super Robin Hood* is the star. *Linus Spacehead* and *Treasure Island Dizzy* are good games in their own right. Without the other three *Boomerang Kid* would belong down under. However, as a group, the *Quattro Adventure* games work well and represent a good video game deal. The only apparent drawbacks to cramming all these games into a single game is that there's little room for meg-hogging features, such as game savers and glitzy graphics." —*GamePro* (May 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The one game in this ill-advised compilation that I'd label as 'tolerable' would be *Boomerang Kid* . . . *Linus Spacehead* is a truly despicable offense of inane, broken platforming, starring a character who's every bit as lame as he looks . . . *Super Robin Hood*'s design revolves largely around dodging booby traps. As such, control is not nearly as precise as it should be, especially as far as jumping is concerned . . . I only have one life in *Treasure Island Dizzy*, and that one life can be taken away by something as random as a cage that falls out of nowhere? Sigh. I've played through four unwanted titles and I'm growing weary of this . . . bundling four cruddy games together is not an act of charity—it is a curse." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Quattro Arcade

PUBLISHER: Camerica.
DEVELOPER: Codemasters.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Game Compilation; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.

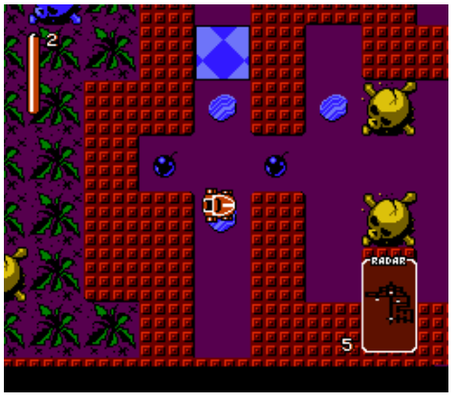
Another unlicensed multititle cart from Camerica and Codemasters, *Quattro Arcade* features four previously unreleased games. A shooter *1942* fans might enjoy, *F-16 Renegade* is a vertical scroller where you fly over forests, deserts, and an arctic wasteland, firing bullets and bombs at tanks and planes. Said planes move in distinct patterns and release power-ups. Certain levels offer a third person, behind-the-plane perspective. *C.J.'s Elephant Antics* is a cute side-scrolling platformer where you guide C.J. as he runs, jumps (over spikes and on moving platforms), throws bouncing bombs, and shoots peanuts through his trunk at such enemies as freaky frogs and savage snowmen. In *Go! Dizzy Go!*, the egg-shaped Dizzy and his pal Denzil maneuver around a series of 25 themed, top-down mazes (Underwater, Forest, Pyramid, Mountain, and Castle), collecting fruits and power-ups (shields, smart bombs, the ability to move blocks) while avoiding enemies that move slowly. Featuring 16 levels, *Stunt Buggies* is a top-down, *Rally-X*-style racer where you drive around mazes, making sharp turns around corners, collecting bombs, and avoiding or blowing smoke on a cartoonish assortment of enemy vehicles.

Notable Quotable:

"Four games that might not have otherwise stood on their own, but together they make a worthwhile collection . . . The graphics of all four games are good and generally match up to the standards of the time. Unfortunately the fast-paced, high-pitched style of music will be familiar to players of previous Codemasters-developed games." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

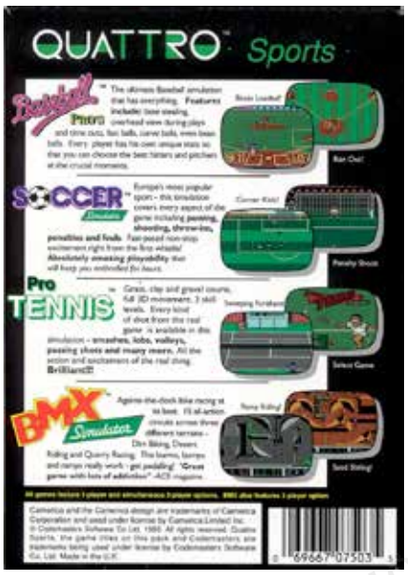
"*Quattro Arcade* is another unlicensed four-in-one game cartridge brought to you by Codemasters. Thankfully it's leagues better than its hit-and-miss predecessor, *Quattro Adventure*. Here's a thought, though: why not devote development resources to one great game instead of four decent ones? Wouldn't that be easier and less stress inducing for all concerned?" —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Quattro Sports

PUBLISHER: Camerica.
DEVELOPER: Codemasters.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Multi-Game Compilation; 1–3 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



As you may have guessed by the title, *Quattro Sports* features four sports games in one cartridge. And, like the other Camerica collections, it's unlicensed. *Baseball Pros* boasts 16 teams, each with players who have different statistics. You can bunt, move your batter around the box, throw curve balls, pitch fast or slow, and steal bases. For reasons unknown games last 10 innings instead of the traditional 9. Viewed from a top-down perspective, *Soccer Simulation* features throw-ins, penalties, and fouls, but it moves much faster than the real sport. Giving you a selection of three different court surfaces—grass, clay, and gravel—*Pro Tennis* features lobs, smashes, volleys, and other typical tennis hits, but serving the ball in bounds can be tough. Similar to (but nowhere near as good as) *Ivan "Ironman" Stewart's Super Off Road*, *BMX Simulator* offers 15 different tracks across three types of terrain: Dirt Biking, Desert Riding, and Quarry Racing. *Quattro Sports* was released in a standard version as well as a compact cartridge format that requires the Aladdin Deck Enhancer.

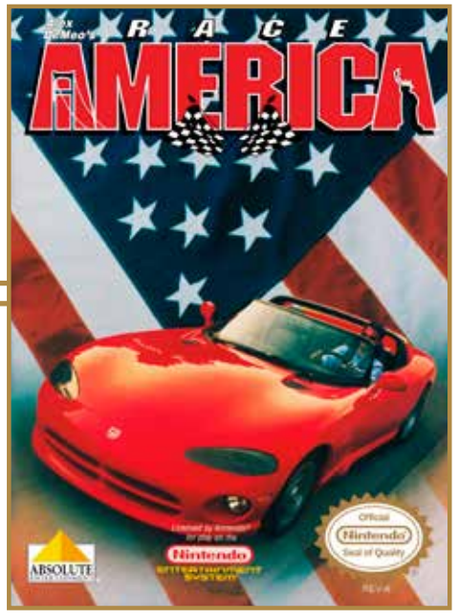
Notable Quotable:
"While it doesn't have the depth of some of the more recent NES games, with a mate this is one cart that keeps you interested for ages. It's good fun and worth the money." —*N-Force* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"Of all the games in this collection I had the most fun with *Soccer Simulator*. It's no *FIFA*, but it is extremely manic, frantic, and surprisingly competent . . . *Baseball Pros* is competent but unfortunately dull. While not as bad as NES *Baseball*, I found playing on the pitching/receiving end against the AI to be super un-fun. While I could pitch, I could almost never strike, and the worst part was trying to catch the ball was overly difficult. The outfielders moved like slugs and passing was stupid confusing. On the flip side, playing batter was just as annoying . . . [*Pro Tennis*] feels like you have no control over the power, direction, or anything the ball does . . . *BMX Simulator* is the absolute worst of the bunch." —Nathan Major (sharkberg.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Race America

PUBLISHER: Absolute Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering.
GAME TYPE: Sports Car Racing; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



Much different than most racing video games, *Race America* begins with sideview, split-screen drag racing, where you must focus on acceleration, speed, shifting gears, RPMs, oil slicks, and the opponent's car. Fans of *Drag Race* for the Atari 2600 may get a kick out of this. Then the game switches to the more typical behind-the-car perspective of such popular racers as *Pole Position* and *Rad Racer*, with you facing off against one of eight other drivers—including such ethnic and regional stereotypes as Mike Linguini, Pierre Sedan, Derrick Stetson, and Hans Von Brakeman—in a twisting, turning race across America, dodging other cars on the road. The race goes from Boston to Los Angeles, with eight cities in between: New York; Washington, DC; Cincinnati; Detroit; Chicago; Kansas City; Dallas; and Denver. You can accelerate, upshift, downshift, brake, and steer right and left, and you can refuel by driving over gas cans. Interestingly, if you're in second place your car is viewed in a small trailing window at the bottom of the screen. If you pass the lead car your vehicle will switch to the larger window above and your opponent will appear in the trailing window. During super close races the view switches to overhead. Unfortunately for collectors looking to add it to their NES library this is one of the harder-to-find, more obscure games for the console.

Notable Quotable:

"One of my favorites from the NES platform . . . Traffic could be a little difficult to deal with at times, especially when the player is behind . . . one of the few arcade racers on the NES platform that has the potential to keep you hooked in for hours on end." —Critic's Corner (www.criticstake.yolasite.com)

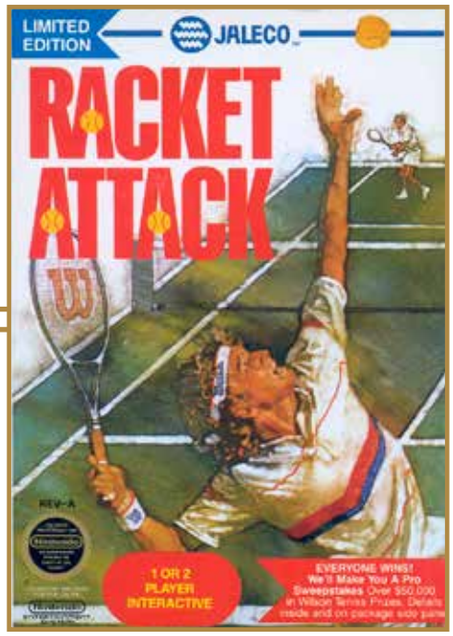
Notable Quotable:

"If you've already burned the competition in NES roadsters such as *Rad Racer* and *Rad Racer II*, don't expect anything outrageous in *Race America*. The drivin' is pretty routine, except for the awkward gear shifting mechanism. Graphics and sounds? I'm not shoutin,' but I'm not poutin'. In a nutshell, *Race America*'s strongest asset is its split screen versus mode for one or two racers together. If that feature sounds appealing you'll want to take *Race America* for an NES spin today!" —*GamePro* (May 1992)

SOMERSET PUBLISHING

Racket Attack

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Tennis; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.

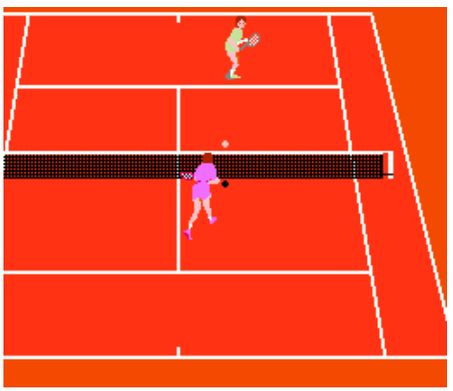


Racket Attack does a nice job simulating real tennis. You must position your player to the left or right of the ball when it is hit your way. Once in position you can lob, volley, smash, or slice the ball. When serving you can spin, slice, or simply hit the ball straight. If you hit the ball when it is too high in the air your serve will go long. If you hit the ball when it is too low your serve will hit the net. Court surfaces include hard, clay, or grass. You can choose from 16 different characters (eight males, eight females), each with different attributes. They move believably and are drawn proportionally to the court and the net. As the players hit the ball back and forth the camera moves smoothly with the action. When a player scores a point, an announcer calls out the score in a clear voice. Audience members cheer. The manual recommends that gamers keep track of their own tournaments (meaning there's not an actual tournament mode), but the game does offer a password-backed, seven-match competition against the computer. The music is simplistic, but overall this is an engrossing game that is just the ticket when it's raining, or if you don't have the energy or the time to run down to the local courts.

Notable Quotable:
"Completely addresses every aspect of the sport in a fun and entertaining manner . . . excellent gameplay . . . fantastic graphics, sounds, and vocal effects that vividly bring *Racket Attack* to life . . . a complex and engrossing battle of quick coordination and fast thinking . . . It goes way beyond earlier efforts like Nintendo's own *Tennis* . . . a truly addictive game that will appeal to everyone." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"A more realistic and lifelike tennis simulation than any we've seen in video game cartridge form. In fact, *Racket Attack* gives several computer tennis simulations some very serious competition . . . a fast-moving game . . . Animation is superb, giving the look of real tennis players instead of cartoonish representations . . . It has realism, excitement, variety, and depth." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"It'll take long hours of often frustrating practice before you can launch your own racket attack . . . Visuals are the game's one serious problem. The animation of the players is so slow that they often complete the swing nearly a full second after you've punched in the action! And from some angles it isn't even necessary to connect with the ball for it to be returned—while from other angles you'll swear you hit the ball, yet it'll just lie there . . . The voice synthesizer is good, but the tinkly music is an earsore, and the crowd sounds are anemic . . . the computer is the ultimate wimp player: it always lets out-of-bound balls go." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)



Insider Insight: *Racket Attack* indirectly initiated my tennis career and love of the sport. In late 1988, my older brother rented *Racket Attack* because it was the only game left on the shelf. After playing all weekend with our cousin we learned the rules of tennis and the goofy scoring system, thanks in part to the game's digitized speech. Fast forward years later, my brother started playing tennis at camp and in school because of the knowledge gained from playing Jaleco's release. However, the thing about tennis is that you need two people, so we would often be practice partners. In turn, I then played at camps and all through high school, eventually becoming a state qualifier. Funny to think all those hours spent on the court might never have happened if it wasn't for *Racket Attack*.—Zachary Gasiorowski, Editor in Chief of myGamer.com; follow on Twitter @ZackGaz

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rad Racer

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Square.
GAME TYPE: Sports Car Racing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.

A game that appears to be inspired by Sega's *Out Run*, this early title from Square should appeal to most fans of arcade-style racing games. After selecting one of two cars—a 328 Twin Turbo or an F1 Machine—you begin racing on the first of eight different twisting, turning, timed courses, including a run through the Rocky Mountains, a stretch in Athens, Greece, and a spectacular looking night drive toward the San Francisco skyline. With each successive course a new enemy car is added, such as a Corvette, Lamborghini, or Mercedes-Benz. Bumping into other cars is allowable but dangerous, since getting bumped into roadside trees and signs is a common occurrence, especially during turns. The view is from behind your car, which moves at an immensely satisfying, turbo-enhanced maximum speed of 255 kmph. Strategies include paying attention to roadside curve signs, going out/in/out around curves, and using the slipstream (aligning your car behind an enemy car keeps it from being attacked by that vehicle). Like *3-D WorldRunner*, *Rad Racer* was originally packaged with a cheaply produced pair of 3-D glasses, though *WorldRunner* uses the 3-D effect to much better, um, effect. From what I've heard and the anecdotal evidence I've seen the vast majority of gamers play *Rad Racer*, which is one of the more popular racing games for the NES, in 2-D mode. That's certainly the case with me.

Notable Quotable:
"I can remember looking at the *Rad Racer* flap at Toys "R" Us (remember the old system of flaps and slips?) and seeing that the game was in 3D. That was enough for me. Thankfully *Rad Racer* turned out to be a great racing game that was my second favorite racer of the generation, right after *OutRun* on the Master System." —Levi Buchanan (www.ign.com), IGN Wireless & Retro Editor

Notable Quotable:
"I really do love this game. Outside of *Victory Run* on the PC Engine this is the driving game to play. It is mindbogglingly playable and has many stages to complete. The graphics are a bit on the simple side but the tunes are excellent. There are road dips and very little flicker on the characters. This game will have you coming back for more; it is very exhilarating to play." —*Computer and Video Games* (July 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"Knockout graphics—Frisco and L.A. at night are miracles!—responsive controls, your choice of music (!), and breakneck pace make this a delight. The 3D mode is just okay, though; you have to turn the brightness *way* up, and even then the only real depth you get is between the road and the horizon. There's practically no dimension to the cars or obstacles, and the L.A. skyline is totally dim. Nonetheless, the 2D *Rad Racer* is a classic! —*How to Win at Nintendo Games* (St. Martin's Press, 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"Most NES veterans should be familiar with one of the best racing games on the NES. But quick show of hands—how many knew that it was made by Square? Yep, the developer responsible for *Final Fantasy* released *Rad Racer* (*Highway Star* in Japan) just months

© SCHOLASTIC PUBLISHING

before its famous RPG. *Rad Racer* always stands out as one of my fondest childhood memories. I can still recall my dad sitting there in the living room with us as we took turns racing and wiping out after hitting a tree. He was just as thrilled with all the high-speed excitement as we were. Fortunately, many years after my first go with this game, it still hasn't lost much of its appeal . . . The heart and soul of this game are the gameplay and smooth controls . . . does a pretty decent job of giving you a convincing sense of speed, and your car feels balanced. I never found myself fighting with its handling mechanics. Also I've always appreciated the fact that the game doesn't limit your use of the turbo boost. I find it quite surprising that you're more or less free to use it as liberally as possible." —Jamie Alston (www.pixlbit.com)

Insider Insight: I never owned *Rad Racer* growing up, but I played it frequently with friends, especially at my buddy Ryan's house. As one of only two NES racing games we knew of at the time (the other being the very different *R.C. Pro-Am*), *Rad Racer* provided some uniquely exotic action and thrills, and couldn't help but introduce me to a genuine awareness of luxury sports cars such as Porsche, Lamborghini, and Lotus Esprit. The Ferrari Testarossa in particular had me transfixed, being the ultimate competitor vehicle in the game's eighth and final course. How awesome would it be, I thought, to some day handle one of these cars for real, whizzing 255 mph down the Pacific Coast Highway with *Rad Racer*'s theme music blaring from the stereo.

Well, likely to no one's surprise that hasn't quite occurred. I probably had a more realistic chance of becoming a space shuttle astronaut than racing a Testarossa at top speeds on a public road. But, amazingly enough, one time I did actually encounter a small unexpected taste.

A few years after *Rad Racer*'s heyday, when I was about 12, my father became acquainted with a wealthy businessman who one day showed up at our house driving, unbelievably enough, a Ferrari Testarossa. And of course, recalling it from the game, I had the audacity to ask this gentleman, who didn't know me in the slightest, to take me out for a spin. And to my sheer delight he agreed. We only went around the block a few times and stayed within reasonable speeds, but I still remember the car's sleek red frame, smooth low-to-the-ground ride, and incredible acceleration. Truly a phenomenal experience, and while it was only the smallest glimpse, I certainly can attest that in featuring it as the ultimate challenge car *Rad Racer*'s development team very much got it right. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

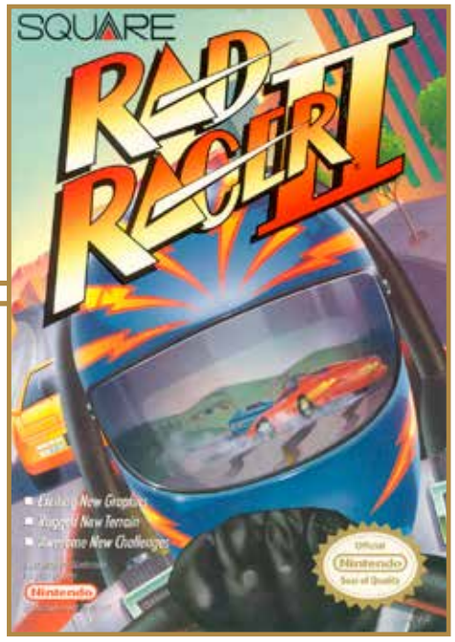
Insider Insight: *Rad Racer* is one of those ubiquitous games that seemingly everyone had back in the day. If you owned an NES, it was highly likely that *Rad Racer* was part of your collection. The first time I saw it was one day after school at my friend Craig's house. When he popped it in, I found it weird that you actually got to pick between two cars to race with: a super cool looking red Ferrari or a more mundane Formula-1 race car. We ALWAYS picked the Ferrari. In fact, the only time we selected the Formula-1 car was the first time we played, just to see what it was like.

The other feature that caught my attention was the ability to choose which "radio station" you listened to while you raced. Three different tracks, and you can flip through them on the go? Yeah, I liked that. But then came the biggest surprise, as Craig said, "Hey check this out; you can play in 3D." WHAT!? I was shocked. He reached over by the TV to grab a pair of 3D glasses, and then, with the press of a button, the game turned into multiple shades of vomit and I had no idea what was happening. He told me that it only worked with the glasses. When it was my turn I HAD to try it out because the idea of it was just so cool.

I was indeed eager to play the game in 3D, and I thought I was impressed by it, but I think most NES fans know now that the three-dimensional visuals in the game never worked out the way we wanted them to. That first time we tried it, though, we all acted like it was greatest thing since the *Super Mario Bros*. Warp Zone. Instead of working on the latest *Final Fantasy* game, maybe Square Enix should really impress the gaming world by giving us a new *Rad Racer* with a 3D option that really works. I've got the perfect (if obvious) title for it: *Rad Racer 3-D*. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

Rad Racer II

PUBLISHER: Square.
DEVELOPER: Square.
GAME TYPE: Sports Car Racing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



A solid sequel to one of the two or three most popular racing games on the NES, *Rad Racer II* is similar to the original, letting you speed down eight twisting, turning, timed tracks, each of which sports dazzlingly detailed backgrounds. Tracks include Key West, Big Apple, Gettysburg, Monument Valley, Las Vegas Blvd., Rocky Mountains, Twilight California, and Bay Bridge. The dashboard of your vehicle displays lap time counter, tachometer, preview direction indicator (an arrow showing upcoming turns, which wasn't in the original *Rad Racer*), speedometer, trip gauge, countdown timer, and turbo boost gauge. You can select from two different songs ("Gumball Crash" and "Coast to Coast"), compared to three in the original game. Plus there's only one car available this time around. 3-D is no longer an option but the background graphics have more detail. One new component is a turbo boost ignition, which lets players send their car into an immediate power start, but this can be tricky to pull off successfully. *Rad Racer* veterans will also notice that *Rad Racer II* is a harder game, allowing very little room for error. Turning sharp corners quickly while trying to avoid crashing can be a struggle. In the back of the manual there's a code for selecting the level you want to play.

Memories: Back in the early 2000s, when you could still find boxed NES games on the shelves at Goodwill on a semiregular basis, I scored a complete, near mint copy of *Rad Racer II* for just $2, and I still have that copy in my collection. This is the same Goodwill where I found a boxed NES console and a boxed Atari 2600 Jr., both complete and in near mint condition, for just $20 each. Nowadays, when Goodwill gets this type of stuff in, it typically goes in the weekly auction showcase or they sell it online.

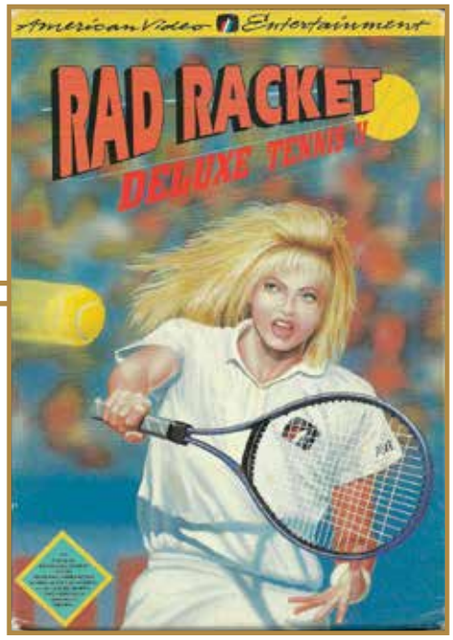
Notable Quotable:
"An average sequel to one of the best Nintendo drivers, *Rad Racer II* tries to recapture the look and feel of the first, but the scrolling isn't as smooth, and the gameplay isn't as good, either. The only big plus is that it's harder than the first." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Race tracks feature lusciously colored, detailed backgrounds, the control of your vehicle is silky smooth, cars are detailed, and the high speed action is backed by a fun, upbeat score. *Rad Racer II* leaves most every other racer in the dust, taking NES racing to its height of quality . . . each background scrolls in relation to the track's movement near perfectly, making you to want to reach that wonderful backdrop in the distance . . . While the control has been tweaked to near perfection, thus allowing you to weave through competitors and gracefully turn curves with the greatest of ease, the difficulty level is just a bit high. Competitors drive like professionals and will try to slam into you during passes." —Geoffrey Douglas Smith (formerly at allgame.com)

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rad Racket: Deluxe Tennis II

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Idea-Tek.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Tennis; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



Unlicensed and rare, *Rad Racket* is a bare-bones tennis title, but for one oddity that has to be one of the most random features ever put into a sports video game. From time to time a rat will appear on the court, to which the sideline referee will exclaim (via text bubble), "Yuk a rat." If a player manages to hit the rat with the ball he or she will automatically win the round. Otherwise standard rules apply (at least for the most part). Gamers can select from three court surfaces (grass, clay, and hard) and from six fictional players (including John Macaroni, who is a John McEnroe parody), each of whom is supposedly an expert in one area: net play, ground strokes, volley, smash, backhand, or baseline. Pressing A hits a forehand shot while B is for backhand. If you are close to the net when you press A you'll attempt an overhead smash, but there is no volley, which is odd, considering that a character named Lisa Starr specializes in that move. You can play solo against the computer, but the only two-player mode is a doubles cooperative match against the computer. The elevated viewpoint is from behind one end of the court, as in *Racket Attack* and numerous other tennis games. Despite the "II" in the title there is no evidence of a precursor to the game (as with *Pepper II*).

Notable Quotable:

"This is an average tennis game with decent graphics for an AVE cart, though control could have certainly been improved." —*Video Game Bible* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:

"The tennis at the heart of the game is decent. Players move quickly, the computer AI isn't busted, and it's possible to actually hit the ball over the net . . . when the players move to the court, both your character and the computer look exactly the same. Always. I picked three different people and they all resembled a white person with white shirt and white shorts. They don't play any differently, either. Charly might be an expert at drive, Chang an expert at chop ('groan'), but you wouldn't know it to take them onto the court . . . I thought I could feel a slight difference on the grass court, but given the illusion of choice found on the character select screen, it wouldn't surprise me to learn that all three courts handle the ball the same. *Deluxe Tennis II* had more purpose on a cartridge that contained other games [*Maxi-15*], but as a standalone tennis experience it's mediocre." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Raid 2020

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams.
DEVELOPER: Color Dreams.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/Side-Scrolling Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.

Beware the light blue cartridge. *Raid 2020* by the infamous Color Dreams is one of the more reviled games in the NES library among those that have actually played the obscurity thanks to poor controls, buggy programming, limited animation, and lousy graphics. With pistol in hand you, as an undercover narcotics officer named Shadow, must traverse six stages (Pier, Streets of Technopolis, Warehouse, Swamp, Space, and Computer Center), dodging mines and bird droppings (!), entering doorways, seizing cocaine and cash, and shooting drug kingpin Pitbull's army of robots and brainwashed servants. Yes, the content is relatively adult here, but you also shoot butterflies and birds, which are surprisingly damaging. Only one of your bullets can appear onscreen as your previous bullet disappears when you shoot again. Pressing up and down moves Shadow diagonally, which is odd, and certain levels must be repeated if all the bad guys aren't killed, even though all the enemies don't appear onscreen the first time through (leading to certain frustration). Shadow can jump, grab weapon power-ups (wave shot, spinning orb), and don a jetpack, and he pilots a boat and a spaceship in side-scrolling shooter segments. There are also briefing screens you can read. These flourishes sound good on paper, but they hardly make the game worth playing. Unlicensed and very hard to find.

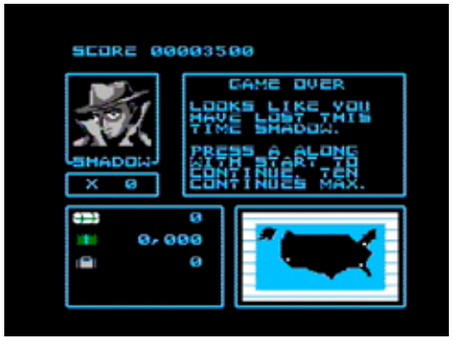
Memories: As I write this entry for *Raid 2020*, it's actually January 2020 in real life, so the game no longer takes place in the future. Time does march on—too quickly for my taste.

Notable Quotable:

"Predictably awful . . . primitive graphics, tinny music, and programming bugs. From the pathetic animation, to the constant flickering, to the glitchy controls, every aspect of the game is poorly executed . . . easily one of the worst games in the NES library." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

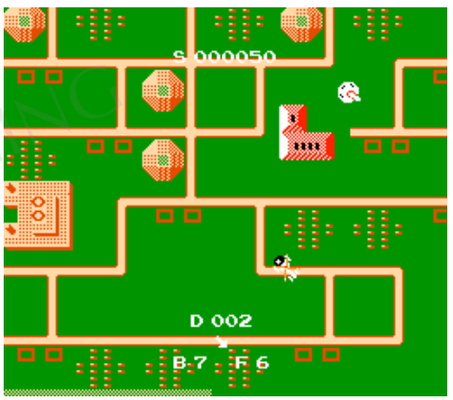
"Production value here is at an embarrassing low, as *Raid 2020* barely scrapes together a playable beginning-to-end 8-bit video game . . . an abomination. *Pesterminator* fans will recognize the jumping mechanics, now forcibly plastered into two and a half dimensions, along with the tinny tone of the background tracks. Others may settle for dropping their jaws at what an unbridled mess this is . . . I pity the fool who plays through this game entirely." —Eric Bailey (nintendolegend.com)

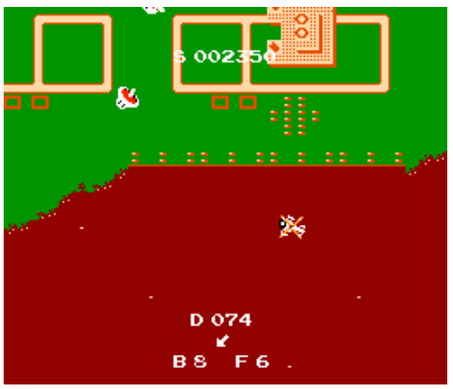


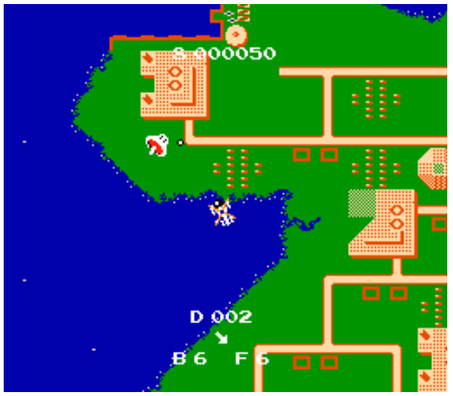
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Raid on Bungeling Bay

PUBLISHER: Broderbund Software.
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft.
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter/Strategy; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.







A nicely programmed port of the Commodore 64 computer classic (1984), which was *SimCity* creator Will Wright's first game, *Raid on Bungeling Bay* is a real time, free-roaming overhead shooter in which players guide a helicopter over islands controlled by the evil Bungeling Empire. The objective is to locate and bomb six secret weapons carriers. Enemy defenses, such as bombers, fighters, missiles, tanks, and battleships, will attempt to shoot the helicopter down, but you can fight back with machine gun fire. A second player can control enemy gun turrets, adding a layer of depth to the proceedings. Speaking of depth, the game has it in spades. The scrolling (in all directions) playfield, which is viewed from a top-down perspective, is 100 contiguous screens in size. If you allow it the weapons factories will expand, fortify, and develop new technology, making them more of a strategic threat. As you strike one area, robots will repair the damage you've done in other areas at the same time. Music is sparse and the whirring of the helicopter blade gets old in a hurry. This isn't a pretty game (the color palette is limited), but it features smooth scrolling, a nifty looking little helicopter, and clearly drawn land targets. This is a quality title for any gamer looking for a different and substantive shooter.

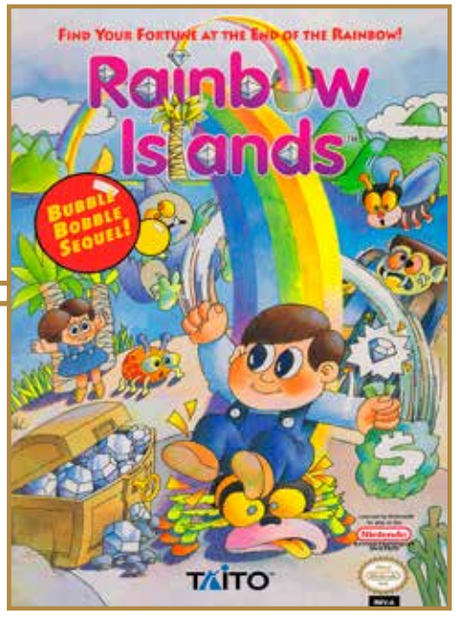
Notable Quotable:
"The impressive graphics employ an overhead perspective to good effect, and the flawless scrolling program gives *Raid on Bungeling Bay* a sense of great fun and high adventure with realistic overtones. It is nice to play a video game which takes place in a 'real world' environment. Tanks and bombers make for a nice change of pace from dragons, ogres, and elves." —*Computer Gaming World* (June 1988)

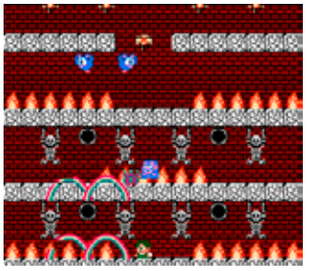
Notable Quotable:
"*Raid on Bungeling Bay* looks like a really straightforward and simple shooter at first, but the more you play, the more you discover the complex and unique gameplay mechanics hidden beneath the surface. Every moment feels like it's been lavished with attention . . . an incredible amount of detail, which gives it a unique and realistic credibility. Your plane carrier doesn't get attacked at random; you can actually see the bombers leaving the enemy's runways and flying to their target. Then, even when the game loops (as it does for each round), it still has a couple of surprises under its sleeves that keep you surprised and challenged . . . shows its age—graphics are relatively crude, the music is inexistent, and the game is overall repetitive." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rainbow Islands: The Story of Bubble Bobble 2

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Disco.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Platformer; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.





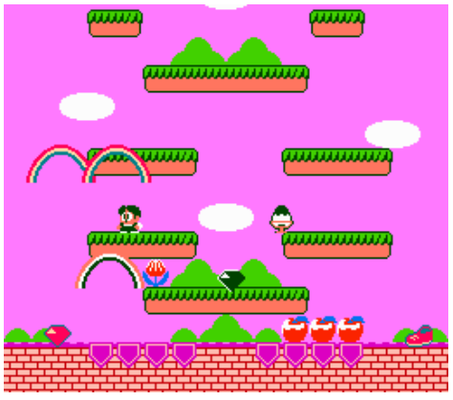
Taito's 1987 coin-op classic, *Rainbow Islands: The Story of Bubble Bobble 2*, was the arcade sequel to *Bubble Bobble* (as opposed to the NES sequel, which was *Bubble Bobble Part 2*). This is a nice port of the cute, colorful game, which belongs to an unusual genre: the vertical scrolling platformer. You guide a boy named Bubby as he makes his way up four stages in each of seven different worlds. Bubby can jump up to platforms, but is better known for his ability to create small, solid rainbows that he can use as walkways (to reach platforms above and below) and as weapons to knock bats, bugs, tiny tanks, baby Frankenstein monsters, and other enemies off the screen. Rainbows can also act as shields against enemies. Grabbing magical items (stars, potions, and the like) gives Bubby special powers, such as double rainbows, lightning bolts, and extra speed. Bubby can also grab cherries, French fries, doughnuts, red pendants, and red crowns for extra points. If you don't work quickly enough the island will sink and the water will rise, forcing you to hurry. However, it's important to be methodical in each level so you can search for and collect seven colored diamonds in each area spelling out RAINBOW. If you collect all seven you acquire a giant diamond after defeating the boss. To unlock the eighth world and get the true ending to the game you must retrieve all seven giant diamonds. The NES game is missing the world map and is less colorful than the arcade original, but these are small gripes—this is a great game.

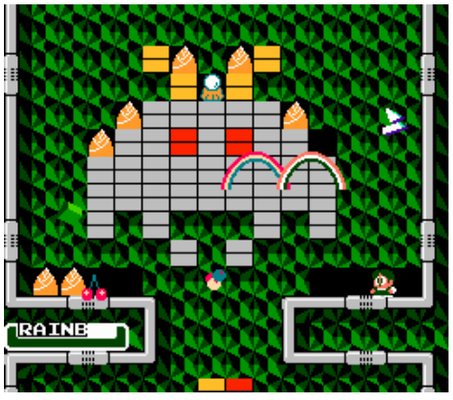
Notable Quotable:

"Gameplay is truly where *Rainbow Islands* shines . . . a unique and downright fun game . . . The increasing difficulty and the 'extra ending' aspect of the story will appeal to hardcore gamers while the fast-paced gameplay and pleasant look of the graphics will appeal to even the most casual of gamers. It's one of the games where you'll spend hours playing because it does get rather difficult towards the end, but even if you don't beat it you'll still enjoy yourself." —Nerd Bacon (nerdbacon.com)

Notable Quotable:

"I was very disappointed with this lacking effort . . . it looks like the arcade machine, but there are a number of highly irritating factors that combine to make the game very annoying . . . the collision detection is awfully odd. Sometimes you just don't climb the rainbows when you should. Other times your rainbows don't kill the enemy sprites on contact. Another irritating aspect of the game is the speed, or rather the lack of it. The smooth, fast gameplay of the original has been replaced with plodding, unresponsive action that soon grows quite boring. Just about every other version of *Rainbow Islands* I've played is great, but even fans of the coin-op will feel let down by this." —*Mean Machines* (April 1992)



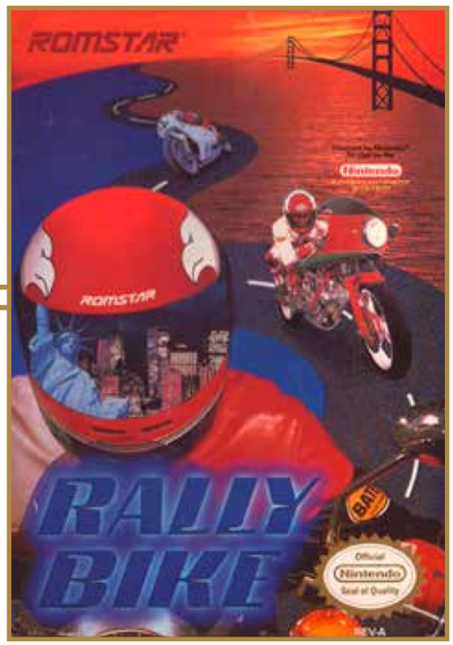


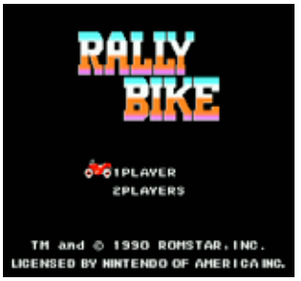
Insider Insight: Everyone remembers *Bubble Bobble* as a timeless classic, and for good reason; it's fun, it's got colorful graphics and catchy music, and you can play it with a friend. It's those same reasons that make *Rainbow Islands* a great game, but not as many people seem to talk about it. Using rainbows as both weapons and platforms to ascend to higher and higher areas in each stage is a nice change from clearing a single screen stage over and over. I've tried to get more people into this game, but for some reason they never seem to enjoy it as much as I do. This game is a lot of fun, and despite not being the one I grew up with, I think I might enjoy it a bit more than its predecessor. Won't you give it a try? —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rally Bike

PUBLISHER: Romstar.
DEVELOPER: Visco.
GAME TYPE: Motorcycle Racing; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1990.





Hop on your motorcycle and prepare to play *Rally Bike*, which has a top-down view like *Spy Hunter*. If you place in the top 10 on a particular race you can upgrade your bike's engine and its tires. You can choose from rain tires (better grip), block tires (for off-road driving), and slicks (which perform well on the highways, especially when you are driving really fast). During the high speed action you must avoid other racers, which will swerve in front of you. If you can, try to make them crash. The tracks are littered with obstacles, including trucks, trains, buildings, and trees, and you should slow down when necessary to avoid them. From time to time certain parts of the track won't necessarily look like a pathway; the boat dock in level two is a good example of this. Be on the lookout for a helicopter, which will drop you bonus items such as a turbocharger that gives your bike a temporary boost of speed, invincibility, which makes you impervious to accidents for a short time, and two grades of gasoline. You'll pull over to refuel as well. Unlike the better-looking Taito arcade original from 1988, this port makes you start from the beginning of the level after a crash, which can be frustrating.

Notable Quotable:

"Can be a lot of fun just as long as you take a slow, deliberate approach . . . requires you to skillfully navigate narrow paths, moderate your speed, anticipate upcoming hazards, and keep your distance from other bikes . . . has its share of surprises, like cars that pull out onto the road without warning and marauding trucks that squash everything in their path. The controls are simple as can be, with one button serving as accelerator and the other the brake. Although the scenery changes drastically even within each race the bridges, beaches, and palm trees give the game a real summer vibe. Simple to play but surprisingly deep." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"One of the biggest issues is the amount of sprite flicker on screen when your rivals are biking close by; it's distracting, and the main reason it's so confusing is because fellow riders briefly flash when they crash their vehicle. Therefore, with only a split second to react, it's easy to think that the sprite flicker is an eliminated enemy, leading you straight into a nasty collision! This highlights another bugbear, as when you do crash there are no checkpoints and you're dumped right back to the starting line; it can be disheartening and brutally difficult to progress. It's a shame, as there are some interesting set pieces, for example in Stage 2, where you're suddenly chased by a maniac truck driver! I also like the varying scenery as you progress, such as in Stage 4, where you speed through country roads, jump over a train track, and then zig-zag your way through a forest. The frame rate is buttery smooth, and a handy map at the bottom of the screen displays your journey along the stage route. The special items are a good idea, but the helper motorcycles seem to negatively affect the collision detection, especially when riding through cramped areas. *Rally Bike*'s punishing difficulty is a real turnoff, and it's clearly only present to disguise the game's otherwise short length. The game does have a few merits, but they're muted by various technical and balancing issues, and my advice is to stick to *Zippy Race* (1985, Famicom) instead, as it succeeds in all areas where *Rally Bike* fails." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rambo

PUBLISHER: Acclaim.
DEVELOPER: Pack-In-Video.
GAME TYPE: Action/Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1988.

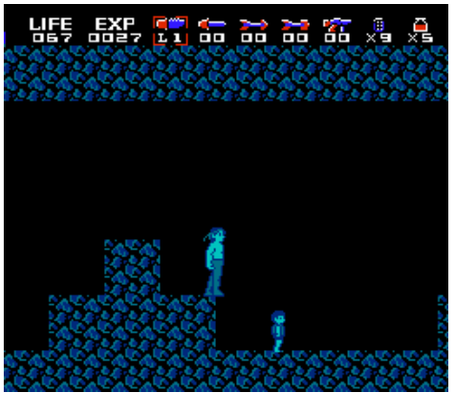
In this convoluted, monotonous, poorly programmed, poorly animated side-scroller you guide action hero Rambo, who looks like an overstuffed karate kid in tights here, as he battles the expected commandoes, soldiers, helicopters, and evil officers. However, he must also take on such incongruous enemies as cobras, firecats, panthers, robots, skulls, skeletons, and giant spiders, along with climbing over rock formations, crawling through dark caverns, wading through muddy waters, and crossing over bridges and waterfalls. Rambo begins armed with only a combat knife, but he can equip throwing knives, exploding arrows, hand grenades, and a machine gun. Defeating certain enemies increases Rambo's combat experience, which in turn raises his strength level for more powerful weaponry. He can also grab items for running faster and jumping higher. The game deviates from straightforward action by having Rambo talk with people to garner clues and stand on top of N and S ground markers to transfer from one location to another. There is some exploration involved, as you have to find your way out of certain areas, but this can be frustrating, since the surroundings oftentimes look similar. It's easy to get lost so drawing a map is recommended. At the end of the game, which is loosely based on the film *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), you must destroy a helicopter with grenades while being barraged with enemies, bullets, and missiles.

Notable Quotable:

"Some players may be disappointed that this *Rambo* isn't violent enough for their tastes, but we enjoy the addition of a quest to the expected heroics . . . The dialogue in this game gives it an added dimension, and it is often critical to Rambo's success, since important orders and even hints may be a part of a character's remarks to Rambo. The action adventure format, as opposed to a straight-out action game, suits the Rambo character and story well." —*Computer Entertainer* (July 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"You spend most of your time just killing snakes, bugs, and other small animals with a knife. It's actually a complete clone of *Zelda II*: the flying sword, or knife in this case; the numbers that appear when you kill the enemies; the way you talk to people; dark caves which require a lantern to light the way, and overall the layout is similar . . . It actually follows the movie way too much. Almost every key scene is recreated through character dialogue . . . It's almost like they focused too much on the story rather than the overall gameplay . . . the biggest problem with this game [is] finding out where the hell you're supposed to go." — Angry Video Game Nerd (YouTube)



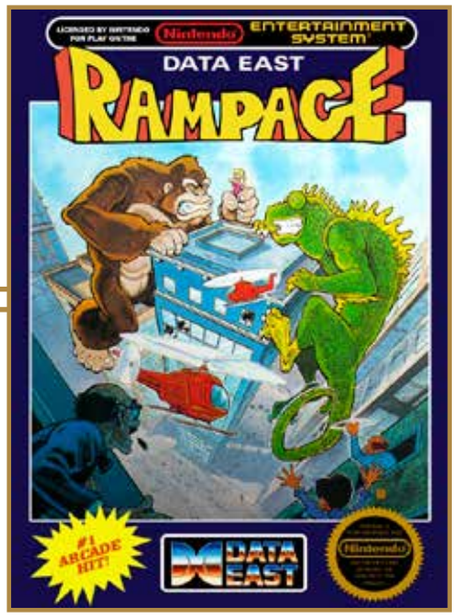
Insider Insight: I'd like to say that the reason I never played *Rambo* when I was a kid was because I was smart enough to assume that any game with a movie title and an Acclaim logo on the box was pure garbage. But really, it was mainly because I'd never seen a Rambo film (still haven't). It wasn't until I saw footage of the game on one of those *How to Beat NES Games* VHS tapes that my interest was piqued. I loved *Metroid*, and *Rambo* looked like it played kind of like that.

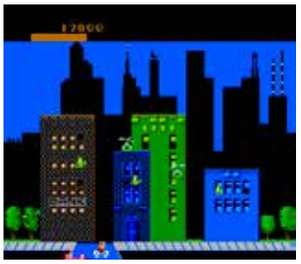
And it does! Sure, it's not nearly as polished as something you'd get from Nintendo, but there's a decent game buried under the not-so-perfect controls and the often hilarious cartoon renderings of John Rambo, Colonel Trautman, and the rest of the cast. I don't count *Rambo* among my all-time favorites but I'm sure glad I gave it a chance. It would have been a shame to miss out on it based on the logo on the box, or because I've never seen a *Rambo* movie.—Greg Sewart, game developer, former Previews and Reviews Editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rampage

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Data East.
GAME TYPE: Action; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.





I've always found it slow, clunky, and redundant (if visceral), but *Rampage* was a very popular Bally/Midway arcade game when it hit the scene in 1986. This port lacks the three-player action of the original (Ralph the Wolf is absent), and the graphics suffer from slowdown and choppiness when the screen gets busy, but the action remains roughly the same. You control giant monsters George the Ape or Lizzie the Lizard as they climb the sides of buildings and punch them until they collapse. When a building begins rumbling jump off, or your monster could get damaged in the fall. As you destroy buildings the military attacks via helicopters, tanks, and gun-toting soldiers. You can fight back by thrashing your attackers, which also include police cars, trucks, taxi cabs, and rowboats. To help survive the constant onslaught of enemies you've got a long energy meter you can refill by eating food and people (yikes!). Certain hazards, such as lightning and enemy bullets, should be avoided. The reign of destruction takes place in 128 cities.

Memories: While I was never a big *Rampage* player, I am a big fan of Brian F. Colin, the creator of the original arcade game. He also had a hand in creating *Discs of Tron*, a game I far prefer. In July 2019, I interviewed Colin by phone ahead of his appearance at the Let's Play Gaming Expo near Dallas. I met him at the show as well—super-nice guy!

Notable Quotable:
"A very good adaptation of the arcade game with unusual and entertaining gameplay!" —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"The game is silly, destructive, and loads of fun to play—everything *Rampage* fans are looking for. Our only complaint about the game is an overly generous 'continue' feature that lets you restart indefinitely with no loss of points." —*Computer Entertainer* (February 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"Although not an ideal port, this got the basics right enough that nobody could really complain. It's got overgrown beasts just beating the hell out of some skyscrapers while also trying to swat away helicopters and stomp on tanks. It's just more proof that aimless violence can be cathartic for all ages." —Garrett Martin (www.pastemagazine.com)

Insider Insight: When I stumbled upon *Rampage* in an arcade, I knew it was special. Taking control of three monsters and humorously devouring cities was the most fun I've ever had playing a game. When *Rampage* hit the NES I assumed it would be fantastic. The arcade graphics were similar to the system's style. I trusted Nintendo would faithfully bring the destruction into my own living room.

The mall nearest to where I lived at the time was seven miles away and across state lines. My parents would have driven me, but I needed the game NOW—I had a bicycle and determination! On a freezing winter afternoon my friend Frank and I made the exhausting trek.

Finally! There it was behind the counter at K-B Toys. I don't even remember the bike ride home or, more surprisingly, playing the game more than once.

Only two of the mutated monsters were playable. It was a sure sign of the disappointment to come. The game had repetitive beep-beep music with a dash of headache inducing sound effects. The cartridge wasn't fun to play. It was missing something special that the arcade experience had. Did I put more effort into getting the game than the developers had in making it?

Years later, a pizzeria had a *Rampage* arcade machine with a sign on it—$250! Frank accompanied me once again, but this time it was for the real deal, and we loaded the oversized, three-player cabinet into his pickup. I cleared out my closet, rapidly throwing my clothes onto the floor. A perfect fit!

I called my best friend, Paul, and told him, "I have an actual arcade game in my house. In my bedroom. In my closet!" Paul came over and shared my enthusiasm but then asked, "What will your Mom think?" He glanced around my room, "Where are you going to put your clothes?"

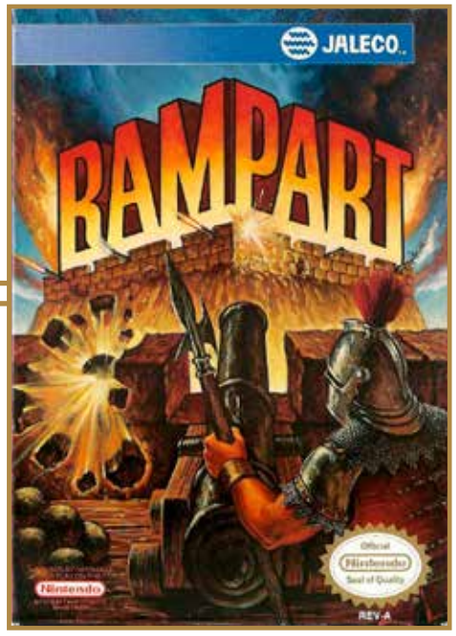
I was so excited I never considered my mom's reaction. Let's just say there's a reason she was recently thanked in the end credits of my documentary *The King of Arcades* as Arlene 'Rampage' Meck.

In the end I got the *Rampage* arcade experience at home. Looking back on it, if the NES version had been a great port like I was expecting, I may have never purchased my first arcade machine. —Sean Tiedeman, filmmaker, director of *The King of Arcades*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rampart

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Tengen.
GAME TYPE: Strategy/Action Puzzle; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



Set during the Middle Ages, *Rampart* is a complex, unusual, highly entertaining game. After selecting a territory and choosing a castle to defend players engage in three primary activities: strategically placing their cannons (the closer a cannon is to the harbor containing enemy ships the better); guiding a gunsight over enemy gunships, troopships, and flagships while firing cannons (the more cannons the player has the faster he or she can shoot); and using wall segments (some of which look like *Tetris* puzzle pieces) you can rotate to fill in holes in castle walls and to build new castle walls. To continue to the next battle players must surround at least one castle with walls. Viewed from overhead, *Rampart* is based on Atari's 1990 arcade game, which benefited from a three-player mode and higher resolution graphics. The arcade cabinet also had a trackball controller, meaning you could move the gunsight faster and with greater accuracy (though the NES d-pad works pretty well, all things considered). The port does feature most of the voice effects from the coin-op game.

Notable Quotable:

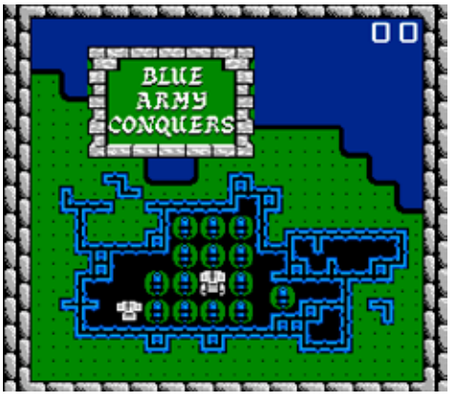
"*Rampart*'s graphics and sound are nothing to shout about, even though a surprisingly good digitized voice calls out commands. But strategy with intense play and a puzzle twist kept us on the ramparts long after we'd run out of sea chanteys." —*GamePro* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Surprisingly *Rampart* is one of the most fun to play NES carts that I've run into in a long time. The graphics are very good for an 8-bit conversion, and the sounds actually have digitized voices that rival the Genesis version. The game is just really fun to play and has an addictive quality to it. Repetition was never this fun." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The NES version is a straight conversion of the arcade, with the only real fault being that it's not as pretty as the original version. It doesn't have any other real faults so it's a pretty serviceable port. Unfortunately it's not nearly as interesting as the Famicom version. At the very least it has a very silly manual, if you consider that sort of thing a plus." — Hardcore Gaming 101 (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



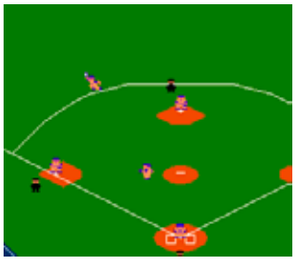
Insider Insight: One of the greatest Atari 2600 games is the seminal 1981 classic, *Warlords*. In fact, when it comes to competitive multi-player titles *Warlords* is one of the greatest games ever. So, when I discovered *Rampart* and learned that it was created as somewhat of a sequel to that game I was excited. The first time I played *Rampart* was in an arcade on holiday, and the clever mix of arcade action and strategy drew me in immediately. The trackball control was perfect, and it was equally enjoyable in single player as it was with up to two friends. It was inevitable that home versions of the game would follow.

I was initially concerned that the controls in the home ports would suffer, as a trackball offers such smooth and quick movement, but it works pretty well with a joypad. I was pleased to see that the multi-player mode remained, albeit as a two-player experience. It's actually the single player mode that held my attention the most, though, which surprised me, since I have a very competitive younger brother. I've still never managed to beat that last island, despite my best attempts! On paper *Rampart* probably shouldn't work—combining a strategy game with a shoot-'em-up and *Tetris* sounds stupid. But take my word for it when I say that it really couldn't work better, and *Rampart* remains one of my favorite titles ever created by Atari's arcade division. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for more than 15 years

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

R.B.I. Baseball

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Namco/Atari Games.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.



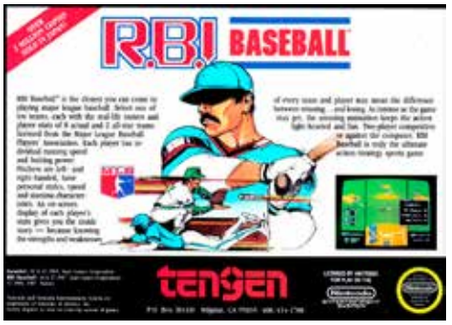
Licensed by the Major League Baseball Players Association (though not Major League Baseball itself), *R.B.I. Baseball* was one of the earlier baseball video games to incorporate actual player names, meaning Mark McGwire, George Brett, Jose Canseco, Reggie Jackson, Fernando Valenzuela, and numerous other stars of the era are featured. Unfortunately for those who prefer realism they are short, fat, and have cartoonishly large heads. Eight regular teams are available, represented by city or state names but not mascots: California, Boston, Detroit, Minnesota, Houston, New York, St. Louis, and San Francisco. Plus there are two all-star squads. Position players differ according to hitting ability, power, and base running speed, while pitchers vary in terms of stamina, pitching speed, and ball control. Pinch hitters are available as needed. When batting, gamers can move around the batter's box and swing or bunt. Pitchers can attempt pickoffs, move side to side on the mound, adjust the speed and curve of the ball, and throw knuckleballs and sinkerballs. Player stats don't change from game to game, it's too easy to hit home runs and steal bases, and players can't jump or dive, but *R.B.I. Baseball* is both playable and historically significant. A licensed and unlicensed version of this game was released.

Notable Quotable:

"This outdated relic isn't one of the better NES baseball games, but it did lay a solid foundation for future installments of *R.B.I. Baseball* . . . shoddy graphics . . . The pitches fly across the plate at high velocity, but once the ball is hit the action slows to a crawl . . . The controls are simple and intuitive, and you can toss the ball around the bases with ease. The ball scales out as it ascends, making it easy to judge fly balls . . . the nonstop music will drive you nuts . . . there are far too many home runs . . . The CPU opponent is dumb, allowing you to steal bases and stretch base hits unchallenged." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"I was able to feel the ball being hit, and I could adjust my position to better learn how to strike it harder. Unfortunately, once I started to go to the pitchers' side, my enthusiasm got converted into sheer frustration, as the AI was constantly ten steps ahead of me. I was pleased with myself when I got six runs, but then the opponents were quickly able to do the same after hitting nearly all of my pitches . . . the fielders control like absolute crap! The ball moves faster than anyone on the field, even when moving on the ground, so running up to the ball is an issue on its own." —The Inner Circle Games Network (ticgamesnetwork.com)



Insider Insight: I have been a journalist for more than 15 years and have four video game books under my belt. I have been gaming for at least twice as long. Games are a central part of my life. It all started with *R.B.I. Baseball*, a complete game changer, so to speak. Real teams, real players. It was heaven for me. Controlling Don Mattingly, Darryl Strawberry, Nolan Ryan, and tons of other MLB stars as a five-year-old, I felt like I could take over the world. For years, even in the wake of more advanced and better looking titles, I always found myself coming back to this old favorite.

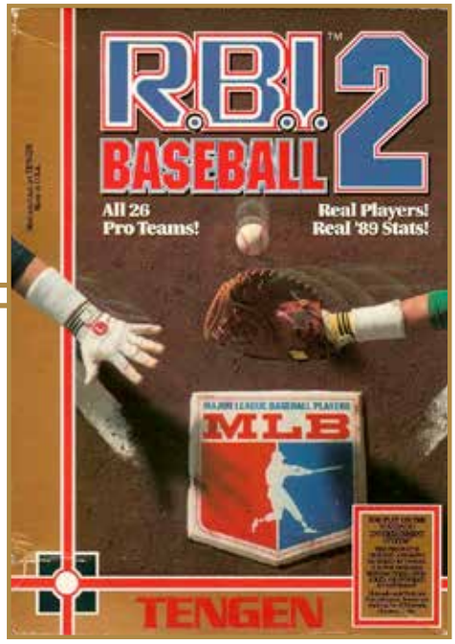
From the music, to the pudgy character models, to the simple pick-up-and-play action, *R.B.I. Baseball* has endured. Anyone who has simply watched a game of baseball will "get it"—it's that accessible. The multiple windows for runners and the ability to sub-in players and replace pitchers are features that weren't commonplace for the NES, and, while trivial now, were amazing.

Thirty years later *R.B.I.* remains one of the most influential and successful sports games of all time. While its current-day iterations aren't nearly as fun to play, the eight-bit original continues to be in a league of its own. —Patrick Hickey Jr., author of *The Minds Behind the Games*, founder and editor in chief of ReviewFix.com

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

R.B.I. Baseball 2

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Tengen.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



Just like the first game in the series, the viewpoint of *R.B.I. Baseball 2* during pitches is from behind the batter, with a pair of windows showing first and third base. Once the ball is hit into play gamers get a larger view of the field. However, there are a number of additions to the formula, including talking umpires, instant replays, jumping and diving (which are welcome features), the ability to turn the music off, better looking players (realism has replaced the super-deformed design), and many more players. You can even slide head-first into a base. There are now 26 teams, each with a 24-man roster. Two skill levels are available. Once again actual player names are included (thanks to MLBPA licensing) but pro team names are absent (thanks to the lack of MLB licensing). Player stats reflect the 1989 Major League Baseball season in this unlicensed game.

Notable Quotable:

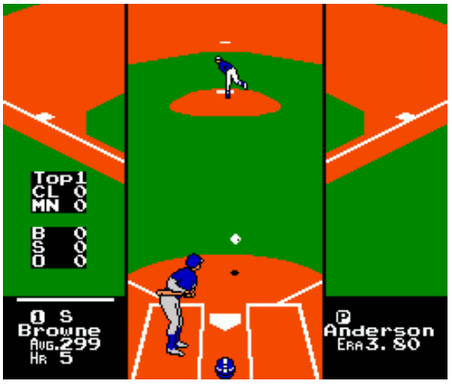
"*R.B.I. Baseball 2* is great because it has all of the rosters from 1989. The gameplay, however, is only middle of the pack on the NES. If you are a diehard *R.B.I.* gamer or a diehard baseball fan this game is a must have. Otherwise just stick with *Baseball Stars* and the original *R.B.I. Baseball*." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

Notable Quotable:

"An enormous improvement over its predecessor . . . one of the best baseball games I've ever played! The players look fairly realistic this time around, and the pitchers look exceptionally good during their windups. The controls are superb . . . the home run frequency is reasonable . . . If there's one thing that annoyed me it would be the excessive number of foul balls." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight: The original *R.B.I. Baseball* set the standard for what a home console baseball game should be. It played fast and fun and featured a ton of real teams and players, a first for the console. With its pudgy, roly-poly styled players it also looked cool. It lit a fire for me for video games when I was a little kid that no prior title could. I was a huge baseball fan when introduced to the game and was immediately hooked.

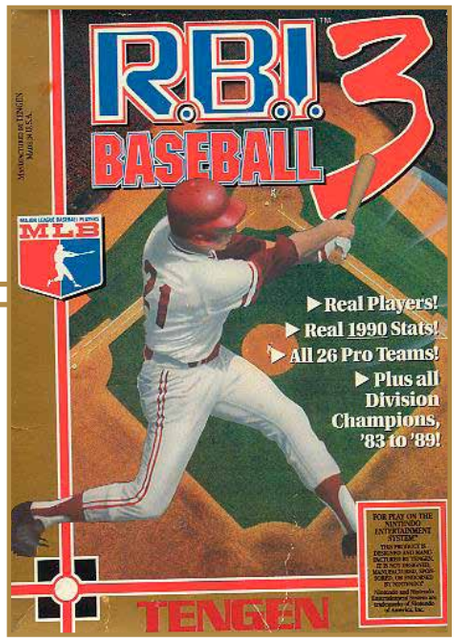
Luckily for me and the more than two million people who bought the first game in the series, its successor, *R.B.I. Baseball 2*, took things even further, with every team in the Major Leagues represented and 24 players for each team. Add updated visuals and music and the game, while still playing like an arcade baseball title, delivered more gameplay depth than any NES baseball game before it. Next to the original and *Bad News Baseball*, *R.B.I. Baseball 2* is one of the best baseball games of the 8-bit era. Although it traded its childlike look for something far more developed, it still provided plenty of memorable moments on the NES. —Patrick Hickey Jr., author of *The Minds Behind the Games*, founder and editor in chief of ReviewFix.com



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

R.B.I. Baseball 3

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Tengen.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



As with the second game in the series, *R.B.I. Baseball 3* features all 26 Major League teams of the era, represented by city names but not team names. Each squad fields 24 professional players, including such stars as Wade Boggs, Roger Clemens, Sammy Sosa, Ruben Sierra, George Brett, Barry Bonds, and Nolan Ryan. Stats have been updated to reflect the 1990 season and 28 new teams have been added: all the Division Champions from the 1983–1989 seasons. Other options and features include bunting, stealing, squeeze plays, substitutions, switch hitting, pickoffs, instant replays, and six types of pitches: knuckleball, sinkerball, fastball, curveball left, curveball right, and normal speed. Interestingly, retired players who were no longer under contract with the MLBPA in 1991 are represented by their initials and their fielding positions but not their names. Unlicensed.

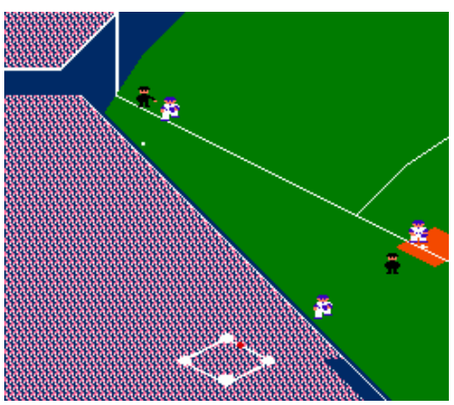
Notable Quotable:

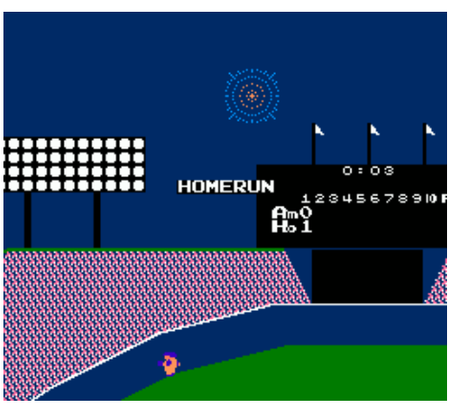
"The players are small and blocky . . . The statistics really don't seem to affect gameplay at all; most batters seem to hit the same, regardless of their 1990 batting average . . . to catch a ball hit to the first baseman you have to move him right or left, which also causes your left fielder to move in that direction as well . . . All of those stats and the ability to use your favorite players are great options, but they don't make the game great . . . I would recommend the outstanding *Bases Loaded* series by Jaleco before purchasing *R.B.I. Baseball 3*." —Bill Schultz (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"While the second made some noteworthy changes from the first, such as overhauling the graphics to not only tweak the appearances but change the feel of the mood of the game entirely, the only true alteration for the third is the addition of division winning teams to pick from. At least the second game added more dynamic fielding, deeper rosters, and instant replay (though that is a feature of questionable value); while *3* retains these items, it adds very little. One could get the sense that Tengen was just sucking the franchise dry at this point, squeezing every dollar out of it that they could while expending minimal programming effort in the process . . . go for the original, which does not take itself as seriously and somehow feels like a purer form of fun." —Eric Bailey (nintendolegend.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



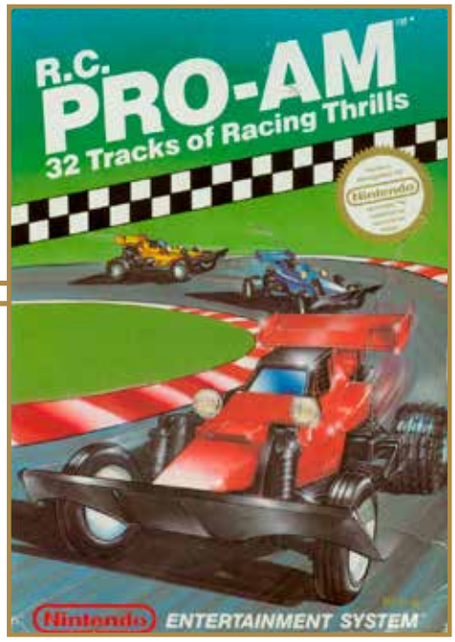


Insider Insight: As video games became more sophisticated as the '80s progressed, my expectations for what sports titles could offer followed suit. Games that were considered groundbreaking, such as *Tecmo Bowl*, *Double Dribble*, *Ice Hockey*, and the first installment of *R.B.I. Baseball* felt like relics by the early '90s. I was desperate for the full MLB experience. *Baseball Stars* provided an excellent alternative reality, but I wanted an opportunity to take my home state team, the Milwaukee Brewers, to the pennant.

The third and final NES installment in the venerable *R.B.I. Baseball* franchise was a huge leap in terms of graphics and depth of gameplay. When I checked out the back of the box for *R.B.I. 3*, I was immediately drawn to the fact that ALL MLB teams were represented instead of a small portion like in the first game. Not only was every team represented, the game included a complete and current roster of players! I couldn't have been more excited to control my Brewers team for an entire 182-game season with up-and-comers like Gary Sheffield and Greg Vaughn alongside perennial all stars like Paul Molitor and Robin Yount. I would go on to play *R.B.I. 3* over and over again, completing season after season, making the game well worth every penny I spent on it. This was the future of sports games and I was all in. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

R.C. Pro-Am

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Miniature/Radio Control Racing/Demolition/Combat Racing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1988.



R.C. Pro-Am wasn't the first combat racing game for consoles, but its emphasis on bombing and shooting missiles at other cars likely influenced such titles as *Super Mario Kart* and *Rock 'n Roll Racing*. Viewing the action from an isometric/overhead perspective, players race their radio-controlled vehicle against three computer-controlled cars around twisting, turning tracks, avoiding such road hazards as water puddles, oil slicks, skulls, R.C. drones, and pop-up walls while running over (to acquire) such upgrades as higher top speed, turbo acceleration, roll cages, and sticky tires (for better handling). Grabbing letters spelling out NINTENDO earns players a faster car (in the Genesis version you spell out CHAMPION). The game features 32 courses and you win a trophy for each track you complete.

Notable Quotable:

"I prefer *Spy Hunter* and *Rad Racer*, because you can really build up a head of steam racing in those games. The turns come too quickly for you to get any real momentum going in *R.C. Pro Am*. But the bumping, shooting, and sharp curves here are more than enough to satisfy any driving game fanatic." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"We challenge any race car fan to try and make it through the first few laps without spinning out, spinning in circles, going backwards, or some such silliness. These cars are really tough to steer . . . The turns are incredibly tight—thank goodness the asphalt has arrows giving you some indication of the way you're going to have to go in the next seconds . . . It's going to take constant concentration. The graphics are colorful and add to the enjoyment . . . a terrific challenge." —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"The squealing of hot tires as you swerve around corners and the explosions when a car crashes or is blown up are perfect. The graphics are okay, but not as exciting. Everything is easily recognizable. The challenge of *R.C. Pro-Am* is mostly one of reflexes and coordination rather than strategy. If you can move the car smoothly through turns, hit the power-up and weapon objects, use your weapons effectively, and recover quickly from crashes you'll do well." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

Insider Insight: I was gifted *R.C. Pro-Am* by my grandmother for Christmas in 1988. I'm not a huge fan of racing games, but *R.C. Pro-Am*'s bite-sized tracks and vehicular combat kept me interested. I fared well in most races, that is until the damned yellow car would go Super Saiyan and zip around the track at impossible speeds. I thought the game was glitching so I had my mother ask my grandmother for the receipt so we could swap it out at the store for another copy. To my chagrin the new copy did the same thing. A friend of mine also had the game so I asked him if his copy had the same issues, and he confirmed that it did. Years later I would find out that if the player destroys an opposing car with a weapon they'd risk the yellow car reaching insane speeds, making winning the race nearly impossible. I'm sure the developers were laughing their heads off when they came up with that design decision. —Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

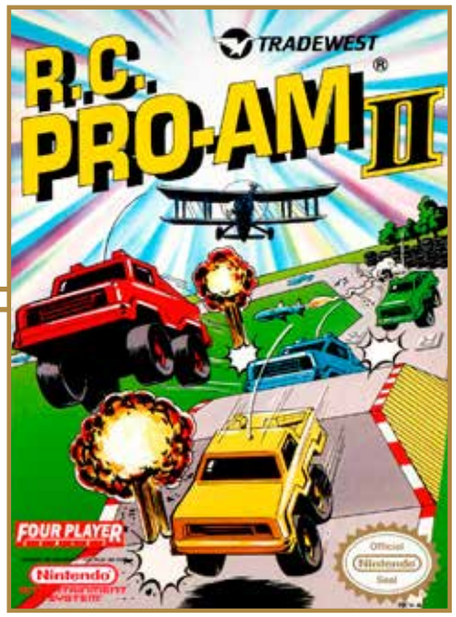
Insider Insight: *R.C. Pro Am* was the first racing game I played on the NES, originally during summer 1989. I played it at my cousins' house into the wee hours of the morning just about every time my brothers and I stayed there on weekends or holidays. Even though it was a one-player game, the level of difficulty pretty much ensured that one player would only get so far before losing too many races and being forced to hand the controller over to the next player on deck.

Strangely enough, the element of the game that became the most embedded in my mind over the years was the artwork of the car parts on the vehicle progress screen shown before each race: large and lovely pixel art depicting an engine block, a turbo fan, and a racing tire. They were wonderful images that came to represent the game as a whole for me. Iconography has been the bread and butter of my work in game development for a good portion of my career, and you can bet I've managed on more than one occasion to sneak an homage or two to those 8-bit images into my work. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

OSCILLATOR PUBLISHING

R.C. Pro-Am II

PUBLISHER: Tradewest.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Miniature/Radio Control Racing/Demolition/Combat Racing; 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



A must-own for fans of the genre, *R.C. Pro-Am II* improves upon the formula pioneered by the already enjoyable *R.C. Pro-Am* by adding more elaborate tracks, multiplayer action, and new enemies, such as bomb-dropping planes. You can also purchase such items as nitros (power boosts), weapons (buckshot, missiles, bombs, freeze, lasers), tire upgrades, motor upgrades, oil slicks, and shields (which make your car immune to weapon damage but not crash damage). You can even grab "mega pulse pulsers," which reverse your opponents' controls. In addition to letting you compete on 24 twisting, turning tracks (spread over three courses: R.C. Race Tracks, R.C. Cityscape, and R.C. 4×4 Off-Road Tracks) the cartridge includes two mini games: truck pull and drag racing. Unfortunately the game didn't sell as well as the original (thanks to the success of the Genesis and SNES, which had overtaken the NES in popularity), making it harder to find.

Notable Quotable:

"This is how an NES game should be programmed! The control is right on the money and the numerous power-up options really add variety to the gameplay. The graphics are delightfully colorful, and the challenge is consistently better as you race along. *R.C. Pro-Am II* is the best racing game for the NES! —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The core gameplay, for better and worse, is nearly identical to its predecessor. The cars still control surprisingly accurately to remote-controlled toys, which is an interesting quirk, but can make some of the gameplay a little frustrating . . . Despite the four-year gap in between releases, *R.C. Pro-Am II* uses the same graphics and sounds as its predecessor . . . *R.C. Pro-Am* was already pretty colorful and had some catchy music, so it's not that the aesthetics are bad . . . with the extended time frame between the original and this sequel you'd think a few things could have been touched up . . . the core gameplay is still fun." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

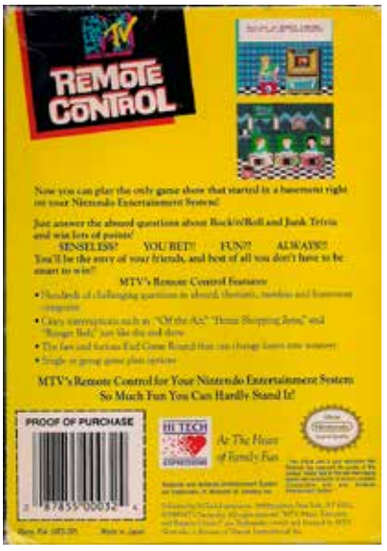
Insider Insight: The original *R.C. Pro-Am* was one of the earliest NES titles I played, so in a way it seems only fitting that its sequel was the last new game for the system I ever got. I'd certainly hoped for a Super Nintendo for Christmas in 1992, but I had to be content with a few new NES games under the tree instead, of which *R.C. Pro-Am II* was the standout title for me and my little brothers. It wasn't perfect by any means, especially due to some awkward "rubber banding" mechanics, but the game was polished, if not overly ambitious. In most regards the game is quintessential Rareware, demonstrating the studio's renowned mastery of Nintendo hardware.

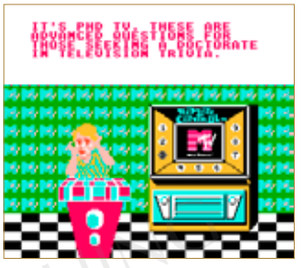
R.C. Pro-Am II was a blast at slumber parties thanks to the riotous multiplayer mode. Sadly, my original copy of the game, along with the rest of my NES collection (including the console itself), was stolen from my parents' home while I was living abroad after graduating high school. Upon my return I had certain suspects in mind and a good hunch as to what they would've done with the items. My youngest brother and I set out on a quest to find our missing treasures and we did indeed find our console and the majority of our games sitting in a glass case at a popular (though less-than-reputable) local resale shop. After a brief conversation with management my brother and I recovered most of our stolen property. Unfortunately *R.C. Pro-Am II* had already sold. It took me nearly a decade and a half to locate another copy "in the wild" during one of my regular game hunting excursions, finally bringing the quest to an end. My collection had grown exponentially over the years, but it was still quite a relief to finally fill the hole in my NES library. I never imagined I would ever need that kind of closure over a video game! —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Remote Control

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Reidel Software Productions.
GAME TYPE: Game Show; 1–3 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.





During the late 1980s MTV began running more nonmusical programming, including *Remote Control* (1987–1990), the cable station's first game show. In this video game version of the program three players, including up to two human contestants, compete to answer questions about TV shows, rock stars, actors, movies, and other pop cultural touchstones. A game consists of three rounds. In the first two rounds the gameplay board is a large TV with nine categories represented by numbered lightbulbs. After a player selects a category (which is unknown until selected) the question is revealed, and the first person to buzz in and provide the correct answer earns points and can select the next question in the same category or another one. The third round is a "think real fast" competition, where the two players with the highest scores compete to answer questions in rapid fire succession. Fans of the TV show will appreciate the game's "snack breaks" and snarky host commentary (shown via text), but the multiple-choice format makes the game easy.

Memories: When MTV cut back on simply playing music videos interspersed with periodic news segments and started airing game shows and reality television, I lost interest in the channel to a great degree. I never really got into any of their programs that weren't focused on showing music videos. As a teenage metalhead *Headbanger's Ball* was my favorite MTV offering. I don't recall watching a single episode of *Remote Control* back then.

Notable Quotable:
"Only fun to play once, and we say that graciously . . . It didn't take long to realize what we liked most about this TV show was Kari Wuhrer, and she's not in the NES rendition. Rats!" —8-bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

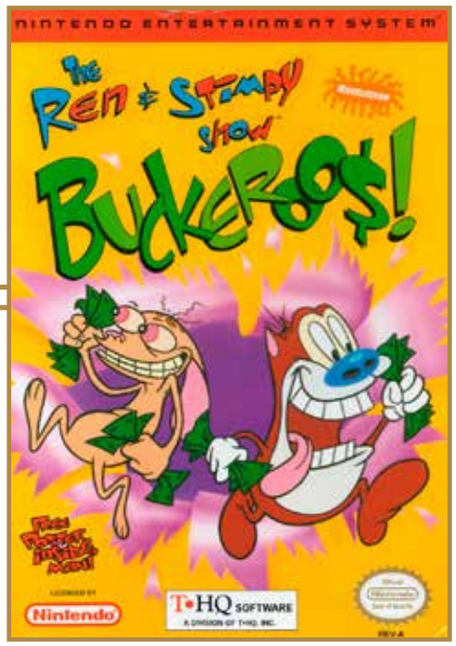
Notable Quotable:
"The flashing lights almost caused me to roll around the floor and flail my limbs about in a helter skelter manner, but other than that the graphics are peachy keen. Sometimes it's difficult to decipher the gender of the various characters, but they all at least look like people . . . a collector of dust, brought out every once in a while to show your friends just how bad television-based video games can get . . . Unless you happen to be a big fan of the TV show *Remote Control* is not for you." —Paul Franzen (gamecola.net)

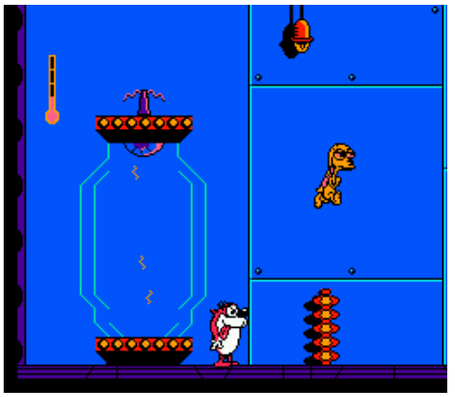
Notable Quotable:
"*Remote Control* may have been nothing more than a low-budget guilty pleasure, but it turns out that the video game adaptation is a real contender . . . By focusing on the lighthearted elements and making the questions easy to answer somebody finally got the game show style right . . . Book smarts aren't going to help you here . . . You're way more likely to get a question about Marky Mark than Mark Twain . . . the graphics are abysmal. It's not so much the character designs, but rather the gaudy colors they chose for decoration. The host blends in with the busy background, which is more than a little distracting . . . *Remote Control* should have taken a page from *Jeopardy!* and placed everything on a black background; it would have improved the overall look of this 8-bit adaptation. I also ran into far too many repeating questions after only a few plays." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Ren & Stimpy Show: Buckeroo$!

PUBLISHER: THQ.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.



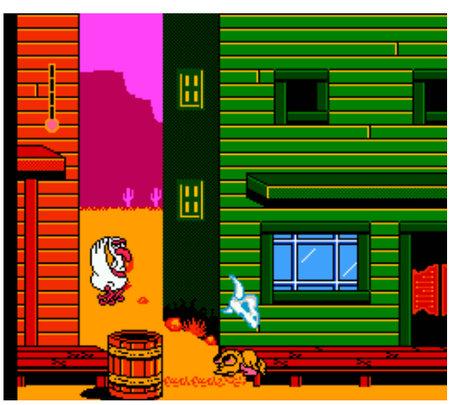


Fat cat Stimpy has a new invention, the Gametron 5000 Moneymaker, which pays you money for playing three different video games. In Space Madness, the Spaceship *E.E.S. Impertinent*, piloted by Space Commander Ren Hoek, has been stricken by Space Madness. Ren roams the passages aimlessly while his spaceship hurtles toward Earth. As Space Cadet Stimpy you must get the dazed chihuahua through the Space Diner, the Laboratory, the Button Room, and the Zero Gravity Bathroom while dodging or shooting monsters, robots, space cabbages, and other enemies. A direction-reversing litter box, a hole-cutting beaver, and Sta-Put Socks help you in your mission. Then you pilot the spacecraft through "lots of nasty space stuff." Out West puts our heroes—Three-Fingered Hoek, who slaps enemies, and Stimpy the Kid, who spits—in the role of horse thieves. You must guide the buckaroos (one at a time—they are switchable by collecting wanted posters) through the outskirts of town, past the corrals, through the rusty frontier town and to the stables, battling lasso-swinging cowhands, buzzards, cow skulls, trough sharks, snakes, and the nefarious Cactus Bandit as you go. In Robin Hoek of Logwood Forest you guide Ren, who is armed with a bow and turkey baster, on a quest to rescue the fair Maid Moron from the clutches of the evil sheriff. *Buckeroo$!* was inspired by *The Ren and Stimpy Show*, the zany cartoon that ran on Nickelodeon from 1991 to 1995.

Memories: During the original run of *The Ren and Stimpy Show* I was dating and then married my wife, Charis, so I will always have special memories of watching the cartoon. We watched *The Simpsons* as well (in fact our first date was watching *The Simpsons* recorded off TV onto VHS tapes), but in some ways I preferred *The Ren and Stimpy Show* because it was quirkier and just downright weirder. The NES game is playable and retains some of the humor but, not surprisingly, the show is more entertaining.

Notable Quotable:

"For an 8-bit game *Ren & Stimpy* isn't a bad game, but why bother anyway? Gamers want more colors and better sound, and this one doesn't have either. The only thing keeping me from giving this a lower number is the fairly decent gameplay. This game was supposed to be funny and it isn't, and I'm a pretty big *R&S* fan who would laugh at almost anything these guys do." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1994)



Insider Insight: As kids we had many acquaintances due to proximity. You live on the same end of town and are around the same age, so you hang out even if you don't exactly get along. That also meant you made better friends with the kids who had better games. I had three neighbors with Nintendo Entertainment Systems, and all the neighborhood kids took turns inviting ourselves to supper at their houses when a new game came out.

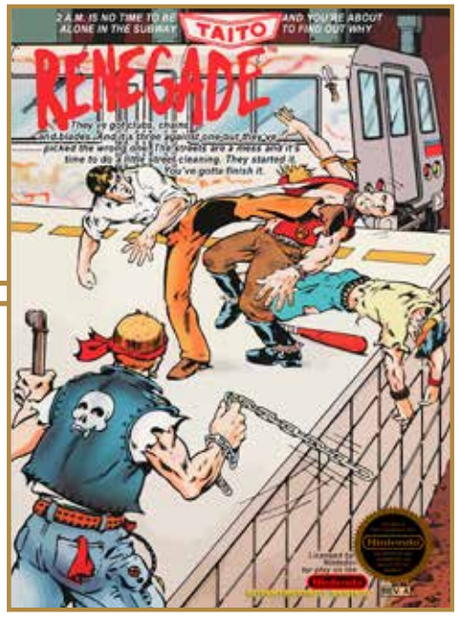
The kid a few blocks over got *The Ren & Stimpy Show: Buckeroo$!*. I probably should have realized he got the game as an excuse to spend time with me because he didn't even like the cartoon. I was oblivious to boys, but I freakin' loved *Ren & Stimpy*. Regardless, he sat on the couch and I sat on the floor and geeked out about how meta the game was. He didn't seem as impressed with the games within a game concept as I was, but he did provide some great armchair expertise. When I was close to throwing the controller because I couldn't figure out how to get Ren across the river his, "Just jump around a lot! Just, like, JUMP EVERYWHERE!" caused me to sarcastically smash the button until it did, in fact, work.

In terms of play the game earned stars on novelty alone. I loved seeing familiar scenes and hearing the "Happy Happy Joy Joy" jingle from the show, but it didn't have the same appeal as *Stimpy's Invention* for the Genesis. So after Robin Hoek I called it quits on the game. No matter, because that same kid soon got a new WWF game and everyone flocked to his place again. —Krystle Tiedeman, Librarian, Producer of *The King of Arcades*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Renegade

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Technōs Japan.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.



As the Renegade, you are always in the wrong place at the wrong time. Instead of going to the mall or to the park you like to hang out at the subway, the wharf, and in dark alleys. Inevitably you are constantly attacked by street punks, outlaw bikers, evil Kung Fu chicks, and blood-hungry hounds. Luckily you can kick, punch, and run with the best of them. You can also knee and throw your adversaries when you are standing face to face with them. If you knock your opponent to the ground you can punch him when he's down and possibly pick up an item, such as hamburgers, which replenish your energy; hearts, which cause a second Renegade to appear; and power-ups (represented by the letter P), which empower you to knock your enemies down with one punch. Taito's original arcade version of *Renegade* from 1986 had better graphics, three-button control, and smarter enemy AI, but the NES cart features a couple of new flourishes, including a fun side-scrolling motorcycle stage where you speed down a highway, battling other bikers. Basic gameplay is similar to *Double Dragon* (sans weaponry) but with an unusual control system: The A button attacks enemies to the left while the B button attacks to the right.

Notable Quotable:

"Too much of the same thing over and over again. Even with the special powers that can be earned, the different settings, and the variety of fighting moves, we just couldn't get over the feeling that there was too little game stretched over too many stages of play." —*Computer Entertainer* (February 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"There are no breakable objects, no interesting goon entries (like through windows or behind billboards), and no visually rich fighting zones. Every unarmed goon you encounter has the same basic skill set; they can punch, and they can grab you . . . While not quite a graphical disaster, the game is no showcase for what we know the NES can do." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

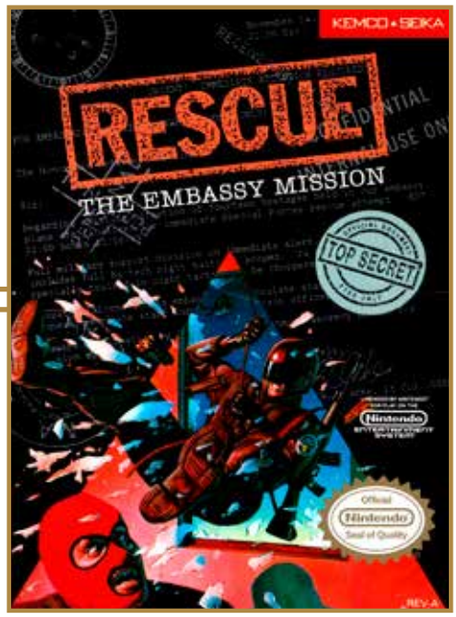
Notable Quotable:

"*Renegade*. A game that definitely needed to be made. There just weren't any other games involving guys walking around and fighting bad guys on the street. Someone took that brilliant idea, added bad graphics, terrible control, monotonous situations, and called it *Renegade*. As an appropriate afterthought they stuck a garbage can on the title screen . . . mockery of a fighting game." —Seanbaby (www.cracked.com), who ranked *Renegade* the 16th-worst NES game

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rescue: The Embassy Mission

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Kemco.
GAME TYPE: Tactical Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



The objective of *Rescue: The Embassy Mission* is to guide an antiterrorist team and infiltrate a foreign embassy to rescue innocent civilians taken hostage by political fanatics. The action is divided into four sections, with the player performing different tasks: walking along avoiding spotlights and ducking into doorways (side-scrolling gameplay); taking sniper shots at windows of a building (viewed from behind the shooter, who is positioned across the street from the building); repelling down and breaking into said building (third person action); and walking through the building, blowing away enemies while avoiding hostages (first-person-shooter style, with a map to assist). All four sections require learning their different control schemes, which may throw off some players at first. Failing in any of these sections requires using one of the other available team members to continue. There are five selectable difficulty levels, and trying to improve your time is a good challenge. Though it's terribly short (a skilled player can beat the game in less than 10 minutes), you shouldn't let that deter you. The gameplay was clearly ahead of its time, offering high production values, good variety, music that changes with each level to fit the mood of the action, and a relatively compelling tactical experience. Adapted from *Hostages*, a 1988 French computer game that correctly referred to the "political fanatics" in the game as terrorists.

Notable Quotable:
"The game's divided into sub-sections and each is pretty entertaining—but rather easy. Leave this well alone." —*Computer and Video Games* (March 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Unfortunately, no matter how fun, innovative, and challenging *Rescue* is, the fact that you can beat it in literally five minutes kills its chance of being a true classic. Sure, you can scale up the difficulty, but it's the same damn sequence over and over. What a missed opportunity." — *Game Informer* (November 2007)

Notable Quotable:
"A welcome change from arcade adventures and shoot-'em-ups . . . The whole look and feel of the game is very fresh and inviting, with graphics that would shame most other NES and Master System games . . . Atmospheric music throughout. Rattling good shooting effects . . . Higher levels are a real challenge." —*Raze* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The main problem with *Rescue* is the banality of the gameplay and the repetitive nature of the challenge. The task never changes, and there's nowhere near enough subgames to hold your attention . . . the difficulty level is set way too low . . . If Kemco had spiced up the thrill content and included a more varied method of playing it might have scraped into the mediocre category. As it stands it's a complete waste of anyone's money." —*Mean Machines* (February 1991)

Insider Insight: *Rescue:The Embassy Mission* is one of those games that I discovered simply based on the awesome artwork on the front of the box. Just look at it! That is one badass looking dude crashing through a window and scaring the bejesus out of an unsuspecting terrorist! If you walked past that box in a rental store I'm sure you'd pick it up, too! Thankfully the game's stellar box art is accompanied by amazing graphics, as well as some fantastic gameplay. From sneaking around the streets while avoiding spotlights to sniping terrorists from an adjacent building, this title really does make you feel like you are part of a SWAT team. The detailed graphics of the sniper mission made this the perfect game to show off to your NES-less friends. It is quite short, though, and only features a few missions to sink your teeth into. Sure, there are a few settings to change up the difficulty, but these settings alone don't add much to the overall experience. Most will finish it in just a few hours, but those few hours are action packed and memorable. I'd have been pretty upset if I wasted a Christmas or birthday gift on this, but as a weekend rental it was damn near perfect! —Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ring King

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Sakata SAS.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Boxing, 1–8 players (2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.

Duke it out for the Data East Championship Title in *Ring King*, which includes six modes of play: Watch 1; Watch 2; Training (where you work to earn punch, speed, and stamina power points); 2-Player VS (five five-round fights between two boxers); Ranking (battle ranked boxers in rookie, US, and world divisions); and Tournament (you can enter the tournament or simply watch it). Cartoonish, big-headed boxers fight one another using jabs, body blows, hooks, and uppercuts. Boxers with a high number of power points can execute four amusing and powerful special punches: spin hook, strong jab, flying uppercut, and super flying uppercut. To avoid hits you can guard, squat, and dodge. Between rounds and when you're knocked down you can press A and B simultaneously as fast as you can to restore your power. Clinching/grappling with the other boxer restores some power as well. The elevated view of the game is from the side, with the screen scrolling left and right a bit as the boxers dance around the ring, which is shown at a slight angle. Adapted from the 1985 Data East coin-op classic.

Notable Quotable:

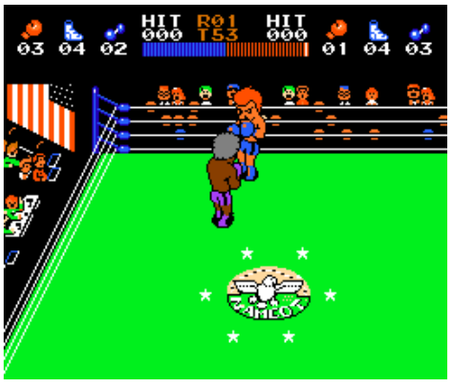
"This is one of those games that gets a bum rap because it's 'old.' Do yourself a favor and give it a try. It's more exciting than a shelf full of clone-like martial arts games . . . very good animation and excellent character design." — *How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

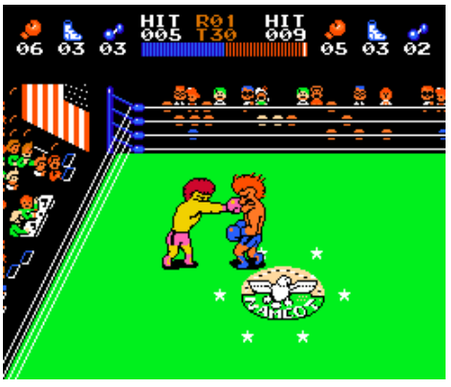
Notable Quotable:

"While it's a pretty straight-ahead boxing match, you have good movement around the ring—basically in eight smooth-moving directions. The password concept is especially nice, allowing weeks of hard work to add up to higher ranking for continued play . . . In the inevitable comparison between this and Nintendo's *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*. we have to give this one the nod as it allows for more movement in the ring, as well as the ability to use strategy in your use of power points. As a result there is more varied action here." — *Computer Entertainer* (November 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"While it's undeniable that *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* is the most well-remembered boxing design from Nintendo's NES, *Ring King* was a capable competitor thanks to its more accurate simulation of the sport . . . Some of *Ring King*'s lasting popularity is for reasons a bit more dubious, though, in that it's one of the most laughed-at games on the 8-bit Nintendo because of some unintentionally suggestive visuals. The grappling animation between the two fighters makes it look like they're just hugging each other, and the boxers' interaction with their corner men between rounds is even more, well, provocative. The inability of the NES to more accurately render detailed animations continues to be one of the system's greatest charms, though, so it's no real negative against the game, just a chuckle-worthy aside that might leave you just a bit embarrassed today." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Ring King* the 78th-best NES game

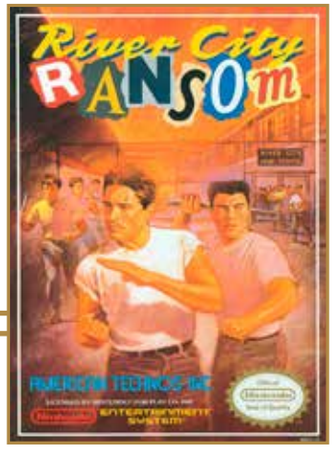




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

River City Ransom

PUBLISHER: American Technõs.
DEVELOPER: Technõs Japan.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Role-Playing Game, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



Slick, the meanest, most powerful gang lord in River City, is holding the high school captive and his vicious disciples are roaming the streets. It's up to high school teens Alex and Ryan to save the day and rescue Ryan's girlfriend. To battle the frat guys, jocks, mobsters, cowboys, and other gangsters, some of whom wield weapons, and all of whom exhibit smart AI, you, as either hero, can pull off a variety of moves, including punch, kick, jump kick, and spinning kick. You are versatile and can block enemy weapons with your bare hands or your weapons, pick up and throw enemies, and pick up and use deadly tires, brass knuckles, lead pipes, sticks, chains, trash cans, crates, and rocks. You can even throw weapons and roll on tires to run over enemies, who bring humor to the action with such text-based exclamations as "Barf!" and "Is this fun?" Defeating gangsters and bosses earns money to purchase energy items and upgrade your nine attributes: punch, kick, throwing, agility, defense, strength, will power, stamina, and max power. You can also buy a book of tricks that give you more fighting moves. The cartoonish but deep and nonlinear action takes you through malls, high schools, parks, factories, and other city locations. Highly recommended.

Notable Quotable:

"When *Game Informer* readers paged through the last issue and noticed that *River City Ransom* didn't make our 'Top 100 Games of All Time' list a low, guttural groan could be heard through every corner of this great country. *RCR* was among the best-loved NES titles out there, and perhaps the system's most popular beat-'em-up." —*Game Informer* (September 2001)

Notable Quotable:

"One of the many NES titles that exhibit the high audiovisual standards, innovation, and nearly infinite playability that characterized the system . . . Bits of role playing come into play with the huge array of items available to augment your character's status. These things round out what could have been another me too side scrolling beat-'em-up . . . brilliantly flaunts the playability and replay value that made the NES a household name . . . *River City Ransom* can take on any 16-bit fighting game and emerge victorious." —Jess Ragan (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*River City Ransom* does a lousy job explaining what the various goods you purchase are actually good for—it's definitely one to play with the help of a guide—but once you sort out the confusing litany of permanent strength boosts, health recovery consumables, and sophisticated combat techniques they open up, this becomes a genuine and legitimate role playing adventure . . . even though this takes its RPG brawler inspiration from *Double Dragon*, it doesn't use the role playing elements as a substitute for cooperative play. Indeed, it's far more fun with a friend. —Polygon (www.polygon.com), which ranked *River City Ransom* the 19th-greatest NES game

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

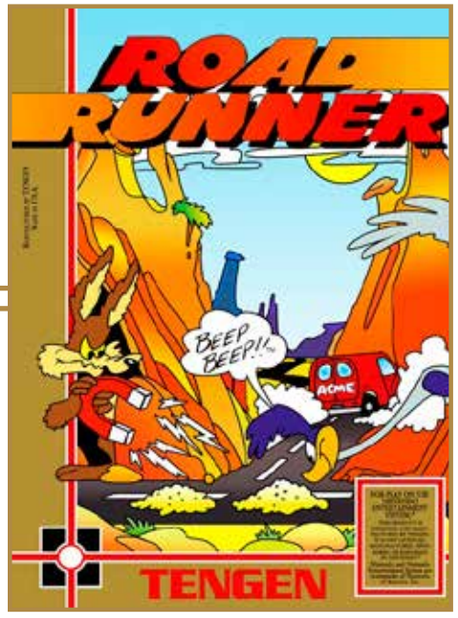
Insider Insight: I can blame *River City Ransom* for my parents restricting many of my game purchases throughout my youth. The reason, you ask? The sauna scene features the game's protagonist buck naked while drying himself off with a towel. It's a comical (and iconic) scene, but they acted as if the vision of the digital buttocks destroyed my innocence. I now own a shirt that features this "graphic" scene and I make sure to wear it whenever they visit. If you're a fan of *River City Ransom* (who isn't?) then you're in luck. The franchise is still going strong to this day! The latest release, *River City Girls*, manages to flip the script of the original game and has gals rescuing the guys. Fans of the series should not let *River City Girls* pass them by! —MikeVito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

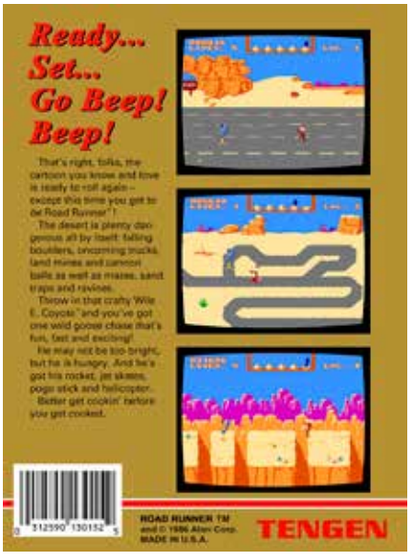
Insider Insight: I can't remember what compelled me to buy *River City Ransom*. I just remember having enough money to buy a cassette tape and a game that day. I had already picked out which tape I was going to get (*And in This Corner* by DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince) but I still needed to select a game. It was between this and *Double Dragon II*. I was tempted to get *Double Dragon II*, but I knew one of my friends already had the game and that I could borrow it. As such *River City Ransom* came home with me.

I was initially a little disappointed with it because that first weekend I had it, I brought it to a friend's place for a sleepover and we beat it. I would pop it in now and again after that and play bits here and there, not ever paying attention to what the game was really about. Once I learned that you could not only upgrade your attacks but your stats as well I couldn't get enough of the game. Another aspect of *River City Ransom* that made me love it so much more is the fact that at times the guys you fight are beat up just enough that you can pick them up and use them as weapons. How cool is that? —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

Road Runner

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.





As the classic Looney Tunes cartoon character Road Runner, you must avoid Wile E. Coyote while running down twisting roadways, long highways, and mazelike trails. You will also jump over cliffs and dodge boulders, oncoming trucks, cannonballs, sand traps, and other obstacles. For extra points you can eat birdseed and drink lemonade. As with the original arcade version of the game (1985) the action counterintuitively scrolls from right to left. Wile E. is not as fast as Road Runner when the two are in a foot race, but at times the relentless coyote will ride a rocket, a pogo stick, a helicopter, or jet skates to catch up with you. To defend yourself you can try to get Wile E. crushed by a truck, a falling boulder, or other obstacles by luring him into them while you are running—moving in a zigzagging pattern as you pass the obstacle often does the trick. The sound effects are disappointing in that Road Runner's distinctive BEEP! BEEP! from the Mel Blanc–voiced cartoons is all but nonexistent. Otherwise this is essentially an interactive cartoon, and a pretty decent one at that. The game would benefit from a mode where you can play as Wile E., setting traps for the Road Runner, but it's a fairly entertaining (if overly simplistic) game with charming visuals and nice renditions of such classical tunes as "Flight of the Bumblebee" and the "William Tell Overture." Unlicensed.

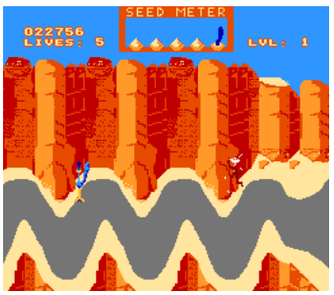
Memories: I grew up watching Looney Tunes cartoons and enjoyed the Road Runner shorts very much. However, I was one of the kids who wanted Wile E. to catch his prey, just to see what would have happened.

Notable Quotable:

"Certain portions of *Road Runner* are downright intense . . . boasts a diverse collection of dangers . . . Regrettably, the game's irksome scrolling cheapens many of those threats . . . You constantly have to take the good with the bad when playing *Road Runner*. Even its soundtrack has its pleasant highs and depressing lows . . . a spotty affair that is sometimes brilliant but occasionally cringe-worthy." —Joseph Shaffer (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

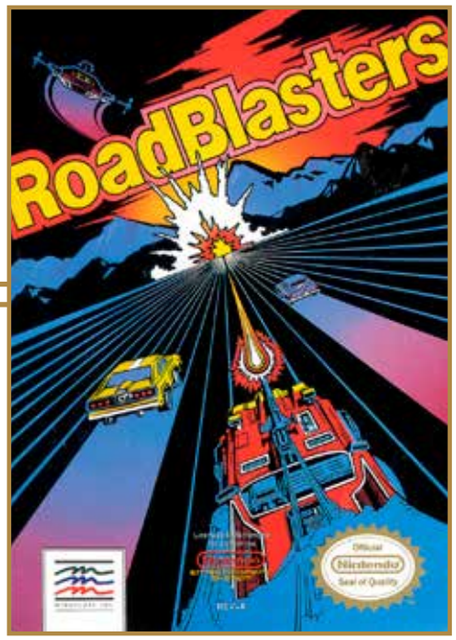
"Talk about a perfect cartoon property for a video game. The *Road Runner* cartoon is full of action and violence perfect for this type of venue . . . Unfortunately, this 8-bit NES port doesn't quite live up to the cartoon's potential. Instead of being an exciting action game based around the idea of outrunning a coyote, *Road Runner* is an exercise in frustrating gameplay and levels that require more luck than skill . . . The Road Runner character looks good, but Wile E. Coyote doesn't look a thing like his cartoon counterpart. The backgrounds have a funny way of repeating themselves, giving the whole game a very simplistic look . . . *Road Runner* was a mildly entertaining game in the arcade. However, this NES port is simply too hard and repetitive to be worth your time." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

RoadBlasters

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Demolition/Combat Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



If you're looking for a peaceful drive in the country, look elsewhere. *RoadBlasters* is an action-packed racer where your goal is not only to finish the 50-level race, but to blast cars, jeeps, and motorcycles off the road with an artillery gun that is affixed to the top of your car. You also shoot at gun turrets that line the road, firing at your car. In addition to shooting and being shot at, you must dodge land mines and toxic spills and avoid running out of fuel. You can refuel by grabbing orange and green fuel globes scattered along the road. You are also awarded extra fuel at rally points and checkpoints. If you run out of fuel or are blasted to pieces by another vehicle or a mine you lose one of your three lives. From time to time a support jet will fly by and drop off special weapons for you to add to your arsenal. These include cruise missiles, electro shields, and u.z. cannons (rapid fire). There are speed boost nitros as well. The action takes place through the twisting, turning streets of such areas as Bubble City, Forest Section, Desert Region, Crystal Palace, Weapons Factory, Science Complex, and Sunset Strip.

Memories: The fuel factor made Atari's 1987 arcade original—which benefited from digitized voice effects, superior graphics, and a sit-down cabinet with steering wheel—suck up lots of my quarters back in the day, so it was nice to pick this up for my NES so I could play over and over again without going bankrupt. I bought the Genesis version as well.

Notable Quotable:

"A VERY good game, with all of the high-powered features of the arcade included. The graphics are better than any other driving game for the NES, with a smooth perspective that zooms by . . . the perfect blend of driving and shooting. Multiple landscapes, bonus incentives, and plenty of targets to interact with make *RoadBlasters* highly enjoyable." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"I liked arcade *RoadBlasters* a lot, but I'm afraid this Nintendo conversion is a b-i-g disappointment. It looks like *RoadBlasters* (albeit with very fuzzy graphics), and it even sounds like *RoadBlasters* (but without the speech). But it certainly doesn't play like *RoadBlasters*. The original coin-op was challenging and addictive—this version certainly isn't. It's incredibly easy, and I finished the game on my second go with more than 1,500,000 points! And once you've completed the game there's nothing to draw you back to it." —*Mean Machines* (November 1990)

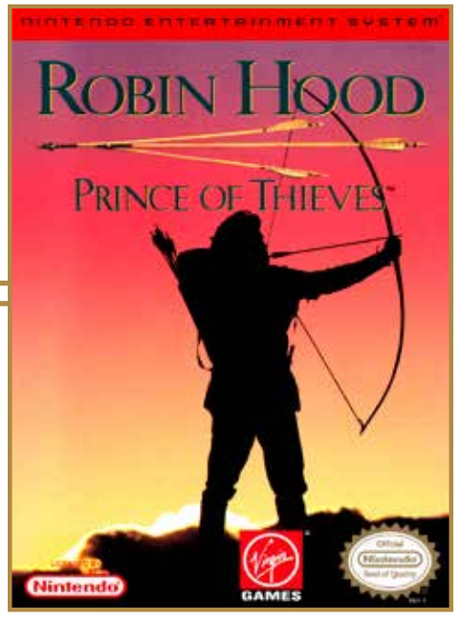
Insider Insight: One of my favorite video game magazines back in the day was the short-lived *Raze*, which was the replacement for Newsfield's *The Games Machine* here in the UK with more focus towards consoles over computers. One of the first issues I bought had a featured review for *RoadBlasters*, with both the Atari Lynx and Nintendo NES ports compared side by side. This was partly responsible for me purchasing *RoadBlasters* as my first Lynx game, but it also left me wondering about the NES version. Back then I was obsessed with arcade games, and by default arcade conversions to home systems. I was always interested to see how they compared, especially if the game was a favorite of mine, as was *RoadBlasters*.

Despite the NES version being reviewed in a UK magazine, I never saw it for sale anywhere. NES games were not particularly easy to get hold of in the UK, with only a few stores having limited selections. This was a shame, because after playing it on my Lynx, my NES-owning next door neighbor was keen to pick it up. It wasn't until many years later that I got to play this version when I got my own NES and started collecting. It was actually one of the first games on my shopping list and I wasn't disappointed. Considering it was on an 8-bit machine, it was a highly competent port. Sure, it was a bit slower than the arcade and didn't have very good audio, but it managed to replicate all the key gameplay elements of the coin-op. That's why it's still one of my go-to NES games, and one of only a handful of games for the system that I've featured on my own YouTube channel. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for more than 15 years

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves

PUBLISHER: Virgin Games.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves is loosely based on the 1991 Kevin Costner movie of the same name. The storyline remains relatively true to the film but the characters don't resemble their silver screen counterparts, not even in close-up. The game is an action oriented RPG with sideview sword fights against the likes of Little John, a prison guard, and the Sheriff of Nottingham, and overhead melee battles in which Robin is joined by Azeem, Duncan, and Friar Tuck. You'll also encounter Guy of Gisborne, Maid Marian, and Peter Dubois. You'll perform a variety of tasks as you go, including breaking out of jail, talking to characters, equipping weapons (daggers, knives, and the like) and armor, earning experience points, selecting actions from text menus (talk, look, take, search, etc.), finding keys to open doors, walking around scrolling dungeons while battling enemies, and jumping over rocks while riding a horse (side-scrolling). Unlike most RPGs *Prince of Thieves* lacks a save feature (though there are three continues), meaning you must beat the game in a single session.

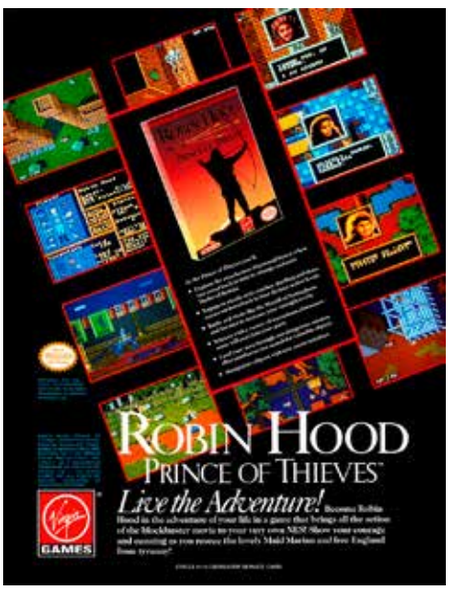
Memories: I'd like to see a video game version of *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) starring Errol Flynn. Not only is *Adventures* the best Robin Hood film, the dashing, daring Flynn is by far the best at portraying the title character.

Memories: I stayed away from *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (game and movie) back in the day because of Roger Ebert's film review. He wrote, "*Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* is a murky, unfocused, violent and depressing version of the classic story, with little of the lightheartedness and romance we expect from Robin Hood. It's shot mostly at night or in gloomy forests, beneath overcasts or by flickering firelight or in gloomy dungeons, which is all very well for the atmosphere, but makes the action scenes almost impossible to follow."

Notable Quotable:
"Sadly, the graphics are well below acceptable standards for such a major title—they're basic and suffer from flicker problems. The gameplay's simple but infuriatingly difficult in places which leads to it being badly imbalanced and having a very cobbled-together look." —*N-Force* (August 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Not much of an action game but it isn't supposed to be. As a quest game it will make you think, and more games should be made this way. Graphics are OK but not exceptional. The quest is about the right length and rather straightforward. No real tough spots to stump the player." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Even though the actual actors and actress's likeness are not in the game, it does follow the script almost scene for scene . . . plenty of great action and excitement . . . the story unfolds clearly and logically. It's almost like you're in the movie." —*Nintendo Power* (July 1991)



CONTEER PUBLISHING

RoboCop

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Sakata SAS.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.

Adapted from the excellent 1987 feature film starring Peter Weller, *RoboCop* puts players in the role of the titular cyborg, armed with an Auto-9 handgun (which can fire diagonally and straight) and the ability to punch, block punches, and walk up and down stairs. Certain enemies can only be punched and RoboCop can't jump. As the action progresses, the slowly ambling RoboCop can grab a machine gun and a cobra gun for fighting crime. Other pickups include battery rechargers (for energy), power food (to build up your power so you can take more hits), and ammunition. You'll battle criminals, thugs, and killer dogs in six levels: Welcome to Old Detroit, City Hall, The Warehouse, O.C.P. Headquarters, The Steelworks, and The Boardroom. There's bonus first-person shooting gallery action as well where you guide a cursor around the screen, firing at moving targets. Cool cutscenes and nicely programmed music help capture the spirit of the popular film but the controls could use some work, especially with stair climbing.

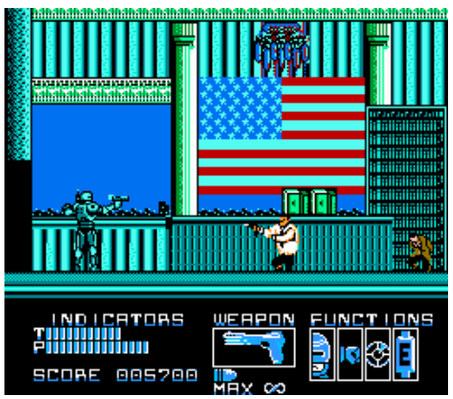
Memories: There are certainly worse film adaptations on the NES—in fact, *RoboCop* is quite playable—but nothing compares to the thrill of watching the original film on the big screen, which is just what I did back in 1987 at the local mall. The graphic violence, rather than being off-putting, expertly cemented the serious nature of the dystopian future the satirical film portrayed. The movie was set in Detroit, but much of it was actually filmed in Dallas. As a resident of sister city Fort Worth I immediately recognized the Dallas skyline.

Notable Quotable:

"Sound and graphics are first class. RoboCop's animation is a little stiff, but then he *is* a robot. If you practice, most levels can be beaten without much trouble . . . a fun game . . . provides better-than-average play value. After mastering the levels, however, you may find that the play—like the character—becomes mechanical." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"*RoboCop* is one of my favorite films, so I can only express big disappointment at this half-hearted Nintendo game. Not only are the graphics very flickery and dull—RoboCop's animation is truly awful and the backgrounds are very drab indeed—but the sound is also dire, the controls are sluggish, and the gameplay is very repetitive. There's lots of trudging around shooting at badly drawn baddies and very little else. Had there been more variety *RoboCop* might have been fun, but as it stands it quickly gets boring." —*Mean Machines* (December 1990)



Insider Insight: *RoboCop* was the first "R"-rated film that I ever saw in theaters. I was only 8 years old, and witnessing a cool looking robot blow apart bad guys was pure heaven. Seeing buckets of blood and carnage splash across the silver screen left a major impression on my young mind. In hindsight that was probably not for the better. Fast forward a few years and I found myself on a road trip of sorts, looking for a new home since my dad had to relocate for work. One night, after tirelessly looking at houses, my mom told me we could stop at the local Toys "R" Us and I could pick out any Nintendo game I wanted. I guess they felt bad about us having to move. After flipping up all the plastic cards to look at the screenshots of the back of the game boxes I finally decided on *RoboCop*.

Once we got back to the hotel I brought the instruction booklet inside but I left the game in our vehicle, since I didn't have my NES. Upon awakening the next morning we shuffled out of our hotel and toward our car to begin another dreadful day of house hunting. As we approached the car we noticed a pile of broken glass on the ground. The vehicle had been broken into! We quickly investigated the car to see what was missing. The thieves didn't steal my dad's expensive audio system or even his portable television. Nope! The only thing missing was my *RoboCop* NES game and a bag of chips! My mom was awesome, though. We went right back to Toys "R" Us and she got me another copy. —Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

RoboCop 2

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1991.

In the first *RoboCop* you couldn't jump. *RoboCop 2* includes jumping, which is kind of odd, considering the heavy, laborious movements inherent to the movie version of the titular cyborg supercop. The manual expounds upon this, saying that, due to his massive weight, RoboCop "can't stop on a dime," meaning that landing controls are rather slippery (an annoyance for sure). In addition to jumping and walking RoboCop will also kneel, punch, shoot bad guys, grab invincibility capsules, avoid magnets and lasers, and ride on jet propulsion platforms. Weapon pickups include t-shot, 3-way bullets, super shot, and armor-piercing bullets, which destroy robots with a single shot. There are 14 levels of play, including River Rouge Complex, Sludge Plant, Nuke HQ, and Civic Centrum. In each level you must arrest at least 60 percent of the bad guys (by simply walking into them) and destroy at least 60 percent of the Nuke, which is a deadly chemical created by crime baron Cain. If you fail to do either you'll proceed to a first- person shooting range to test your accuracy. Obstacles and devices you'll encounter include falling columns, laser gun fire, electromagnets (which carry you across dangerous areas), and jet sleds (which you must use to reach certain platforms). Loosely based on the feature film, which hit theaters in 1990.

Notable Quotable:

"RoboCop is heavy from all of his metal plating, which makes him somewhat difficult to control. With some practice, though, you'll be able to blast through the city with the best of them." —*Nintendo Power* (April 1991)

Notable Quotable:

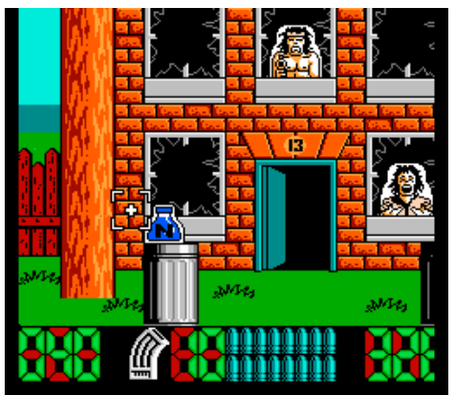
"Although it's a frustratingly difficult game, I actually enjoyed playing *Robocop 2*. Granted, the inertia makes the going tough, and there are some parts of the game which are incredibly tricky to get through, but the high quality of the graphics and sound made me persevere with it and eventually get through. There are plenty of neat touches to keep you interested and loads of secret screens to discover so there are never any dull bits." —*Mean Machines* (September 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Most of the levels are made up of many platforms and obstacles. Getting from one platform to the next requires not only a skillful control hand but also a little brain power; there are several routes you may take, only one of which will allow you to accumulate the right number of nukes, killed or busted criminals, and rescued citizens. The graphics are detailed and well-rendered . . . The music is okay but not extraordinary . . . although it'll win no awards for originality, *RoboCop 2* is a decent enough jump-and-shoot game that'll please gamers looking for something new in that genre." —*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (April 1991)

Notable Quotable:

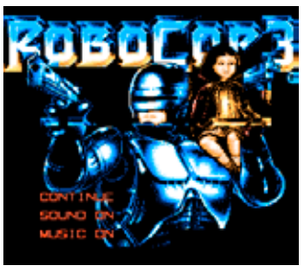
"Adjusting your flight in mid-air is a stressful experience, as under-/over-shooting your intended target is the usual occurrence rather than precision platforming. Sometimes your inputs are completely ignored . . . while you can duck it's almost useless, as enemy bullets will still hit you in the face . . . the collision detection is appalling, and it's possible to die by falling straight through the middle of a platform. Unlike classic NES titles such as *Super Mario Bros.*, this game doesn't teach you anything about its hazards and traps prior to you falling victim to them; this leads to a severe case of trial and error where you'll suddenly be stomped by a giant press, or killed by a seemingly innocuous moving platform. It's unintuitive, as is not knowing whether a platform can actually be jumped on without you committing suicide!" —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

RoboCop 3

PUBLISHER: Ocean Software.
DEVELOPER: Probe Software.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



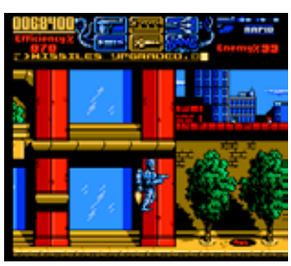
Adapted loosely from the 1992 feature film, *RoboCop 3* puts players in the role of the famous cyborg, who will run, jump, duck, fire a large-bore cannon (diagonally and straight), and even fly (via gyropack) his way through five levels of Old Detroit, including the Rocket Motors factory, the streets of Cadillac Heights, and the OCP Tower. While RoboCop can jump like in the similar *RoboCop 2*, the momentum-based jumping is thankfully gone in favor of more traditional jumps. Enemies to battle in this game include tanks, ED 209s, heavy artillery, and robot ninjas, among others. Throughout the game RoboCop can repair damaged parts of his body (which hinder movement). If a body part malfunctions a warning appears on a message bar near the top of the screen. You receive other messages as well, such as "Protect the innocent" and "Missile jammed." RoboCop can indeed fire homing missiles, as well as unleash smart bombs. Flying RoboCop should pick up fuel icons. Obstacles to negotiate include acid, rickety floors, potholes, conveyor belts, tank shells, and more. Your objective is to defeat the Rehab Officers, who are kicking families out of their homes in preparation for the construction of Delta City. Unlike the common *RoboCop* and *RoboCop 2*, *RoboCop 3* is hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"This is the best 8-bit version of *RoboCop* so far. The gameplay is much better than previous efforts, and there is actually some technique to fighting the enemies. The graphics are decent for NES and the music is fitting. The problem with this cart is the control; you can't respond to dangers as fast as you should. A solid cart." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics here are cool—you actually see the robot mending when you apply power-ups to each area. The tunes and booms in *RoboCop 3* are standouts. The soundtrack creatively stretches the sound capability of the NES . . . RoboCop is pretty simple to control, except when you're trying to shoot downwards. Shooting down requires you to first shoot in any other direction. Then, while holding down the shooting button, you must press down. You'd better practice, because it's key to winning the game . . . If you're a big fan of RoboCop, or decent side-scrolling action/adventure shooters, then this game is a must." —*GamePro* (December 1992)

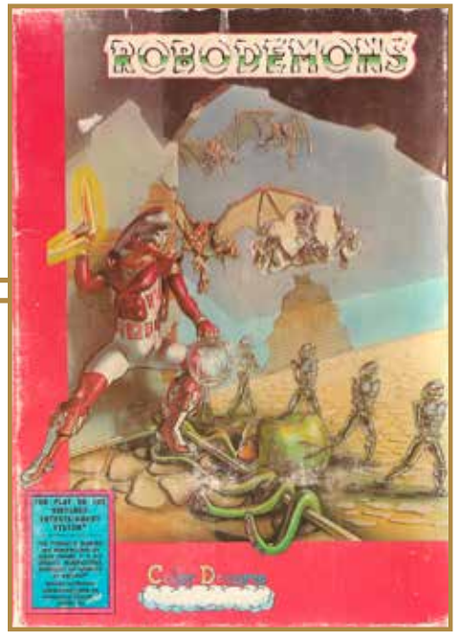


Insider Insight: The first *RoboCop* NES game was based on the arcade version, and it was a really bad adaptation. I wanted to hang myself after playing that game. You couldn't even jump! The second installment could've been great, but they kept making you redo levels over and over again until you lost your damn mind. When it came to the third *RoboCop* movie, it was awful. The *RoboCop 3* NES game, however, turned out to be the best of the bunch! Yes, the video game was indeed better than the movie—a rarity for sure! It finally gave *RoboCop* fans something fun to play for the NES that gave you your money's worth. That's probably one reason the game is so pricey to purchase these days. There was a *RoboCop vs. Terminator* game slated for release around '94 or so but the NES ended its life cycle and the game was cancelled. Oddly enough that game, which I played in prototype form, turned out to be very enjoyable as well. What a shame it never saw a proper release on the NES! —Chris Bores, The Irate Gamer on YouTube

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Robodemons

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams.
DEVELOPER: Color Dreams.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



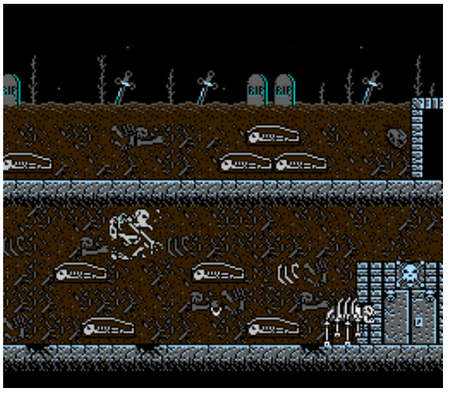
Robodemons is one of the more horror-drenched games for the NES, but unfortunately it's lousy. You guide a nameless, boomerang-hurling hero through seven levels of Hades: Bone, Flesh, Fire, Condemned Souls, Demon's Quarters, Robodemon Factory, and Kull's Palace (these are instructional manual names—certain level names differ in-game). Your goal is to stop the demon King Kull, ultimately destroying the machine he uses to inject demon souls into his mechanical warriors. Each level begins with a brief horizontal shooter area where you fly via jetpack and fire at skulls, winged beasts, and the like. Then the platforming starts as you walk, jump, avoid obstacles (such as rolling skulls, acid bile, and flaming pools), and throw your boomerang at skeletons and a variety of demons, including flying beasties. You must find the key in each level and face the boss monster guarding the exit. Like most Color Dreams cartridges *Robodemons* is a Z-grade title, suffering from poor animation, sluggish controls, sparse and flat graphics, and repetitious gameplay and music. The digitized voice effects in the game were spoken by Al Bunch of Bunch Games. Unlicensed and rare.

Notable Quotable:

"The only thing remotely cool about *Robodemons* is its premise . . . There's all sorts of dark, demonic imagery throughout the game, which works to make it feel like you're venturing into Satan's domain—which is kind of amusing, considering that Color Dreams eventually formed Wisdom Tree to release a bunch of crappy religious-themed games. Unfortunately, when you start playing, things get really bad and never improve." — Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

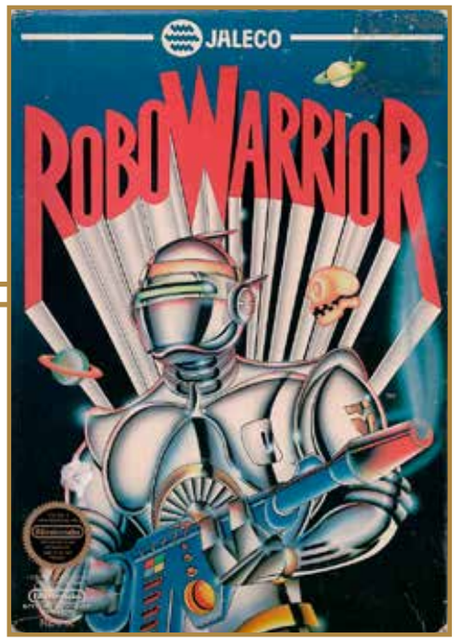
"Each level is a mixture of dark imagery, cheap hits, and a worthless mode of attack . . . There are several different types of enemies—skeletons, bats, rolling skeleton heads, skull-and-crossbones that shoot projectiles—but your boomerang only has one direction of attack: whatever is in front of the hero. This means that, aside from the skeletons who walk upright, none of the enemies I just listed can be killed, let alone hit, with your weapon. The shmup portions before each level are a welcome reprieve but there's no point to them. There are very few enemies, and the ones that are there you can avoid. Basically you float around in space until *Robodemons* decides it's time for the next level." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

RoboWarrior

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft.
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1 player.
YEAR: 1988.



Obviously inspired by *Bomberman* but more difficult, *RoboWarrior* is a top-down, side-scrolling maze game where you guide ZED the cyborg through an apocalyptic world called Altile using bombs to blow up rocks, trees, statues, and other obstacles while shooting beams at a barrage of aliens, robotic spiders, mechanical birds, and other nicely drawn and animated enemies. Dropping bombs uncovers special items and powers, including candles, energy (a highly crucial item), missiles, flash (smart bombs), clocks (for freezing time), medals (for purchasing items), and super boots (for speed). Grabbing power balls extends the length of ZED's beams, which is important for such a tough game. It's also important to immediately get out of the way after you drop a bomb, as it's easy to blow yourself up. There are 27 stages spread across eight levels: Fringes, The Outlands, The Land of Temples, The Iron Hills, Intellicon, Oceania, Outer City, and Regency. In each stage you must find the exit after you finish it—the exit won't automatically reveal itself. Further, if you fail to find the chalice, the area you're in will continually loop and never end. An excellent soundtrack plays as you work your way painstakingly through the stages. Like the original NES *Bomberman* the game would benefit from a two-player simultaneous mode, but if you are a skilled player who likes a merciless, old school challenge, give it a try.

© SUNSET PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

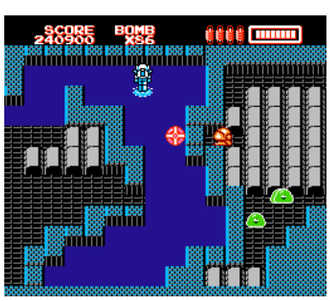
"The small, almost misshapen hero marches along, kills an alien, etc., and . . . that's about it. The only relief from tedium is to pick up the special powers. The backgrounds are as static as the action; the obstacles change color from level to level, but the actual layout remains the same. Granted, the aliens are pretty tough to beat." —*The Games Machine* (March 1990)

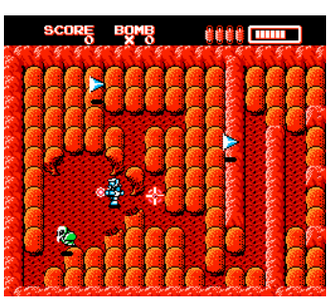
Notable Quotable:

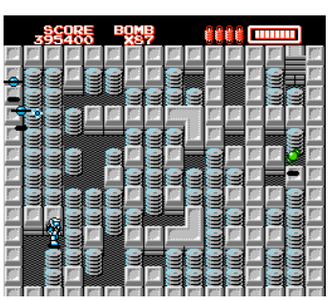
"Anyone who enjoys a straight ahead action game should have a great deal of fun with this one with plenty of enemies swarming at you . . . The graphics are very colorful, although most screens are similar in texture (most change in screens is color with slight variations in shapes) . . . there are plenty of different creatures to inhabit your screen which are varied in shape and size." —*Computer Entertainer* (March 1989)

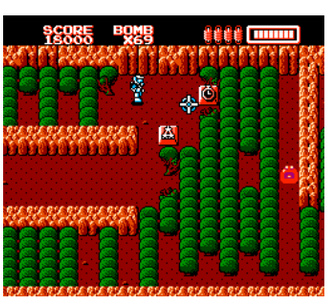
Notable Quotable:

"It could really use a save game or password option . . . much of the fun is in exploring all the nooks and crannies of each level. It would be nice if backwards scrolling were possible. The graphics are state-of-the-art . . . sound effects are snappy. I was particularly impressed by the echo effect used for bomb blasts . . . The theme music is fast moving and matches the game's pace, but since it never changes (except when the game is over) it gets boring quickly . . . it takes strategy to advance through the levels . . . blowing things up to see if anything is hidden underneath is fun . . . great game." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)



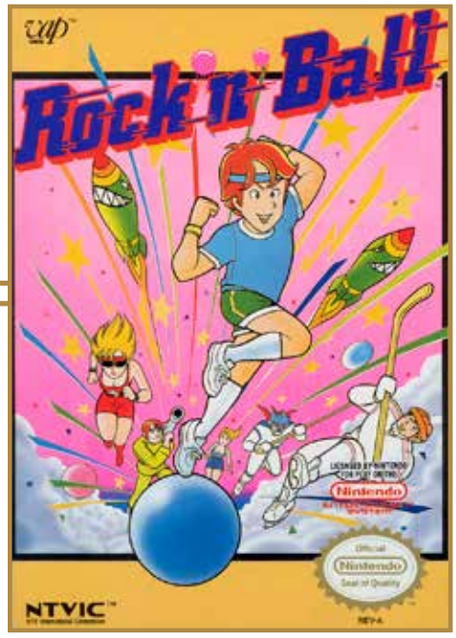


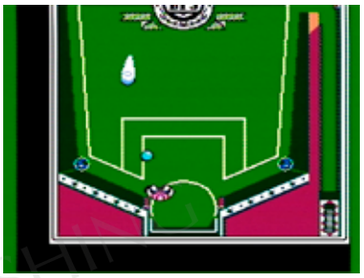




Rock 'n' Ball

PUBLISHER: NTVIC.
DEVELOPER: KID.
GAME TYPE: Pinball, 1–4 players (4-player alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.





Rock 'n' Ball features seven pinball games in one cartridge. In addition to the standard Pinball contest, which is similar to what you might find in the arcades, there are two versions of sports pinball: Soccer and Hockey. In these two sporting events you control one flipper and a goalie, and so does your opponent, who operates from the opposite end of the field or ice rink. The object is to get the ball into the other player's net. The competitive nature of the action combined with slick controls and a unique premise make both games crucial elements of this pinball package. In Nineball you place a bet using chips. Your goal is to arrange the pinballs in Bingo-type formations. Doing so will win you extra chips. Last, there are three versions of Battle Flipper: Bomber, Thunder, and Attack. In the Battle Flipper games you compete against an opponent while trying to hit targets and knock the pinball into the opposing player's pockets. Your flippers are positioned on the opposite side of the playfield as those of your competitor. All three game variations are fun and original. This wasn't the first pinball game to feature competing flippers opposite one another (the *Joust* pinball machine from 1983 comes to mind), but it works really well. Also it's cool that you can move your flippers to the other side of the table and back. There are six playable characters in *Rock 'n' Ball* (Tom, Billy, John, Paul, Lisa, and Diana), each of whom has different flippers and/or flipper skills (small, large, weak, hard hitting, and the like). The Japanese Famicom version, called *Family Pinball*, features Namco characters, including Pac-Man.

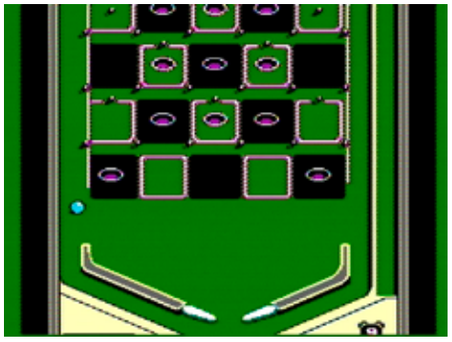
©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"*Rock 'n' Ball* is a generous cartridge, and is one of the best pinball titles on the NES. The tables it gives to the players aren't the most in depth or flashy, but they're solid enough to come back to, especially if you have friends who enjoy video pinball. Disregard its worthless name." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"All of the variations were designed remarkably well . . . Graphically this game is pretty outstanding. The NES color palette is used extensively to bring a very vibrant experience for the eye . . . Animations for the flippers are very smooth and don't feel clunky . . . The sound effects of the flippers and ball bouncing around are stock quality . . . the physics engine is outstanding. It does have its share of problems, though; for instance, the ball can get stuck on rounded or slightly slanted platforms where logic would dictate the ball to fall. There's also a glitch in which the ball gets stuck between two targets and racks up an infinite amount of points . . . you don't have to be a pinball fan to enjoy this game to its fullest extent." —Eric Bell (gamecola.net)



Rocket Ranger

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Adventure/Third-Person Shooter/Fighting, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

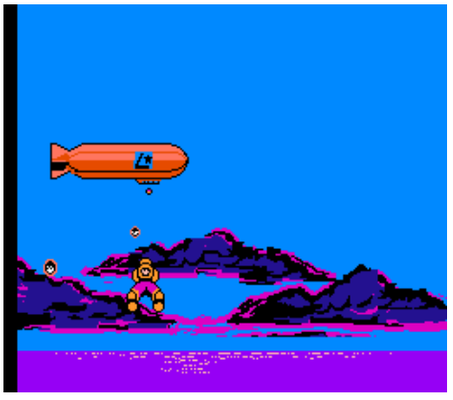
In the year 1990, aliens descend upon Earth and establish a new country in Europe called Leutonia. Led by the evil Colonel Krag, their mission is to conquer our planet. They've also kidnapped Dr. Barnstorff and his daughter Jane. It is up to you as the Rocket Ranger (a hero similar to the Rocketeer), equipped with a futuristic flying suit, to save the day. The game is divided into strategy and action scenarios. In the former you control the action and placement of agents to infiltrate an area and set up resistance through selections from a menu. During the shooting areas you view your character from behind (à la *Space Harrier*) while moving in all directions around the screen, firing away at alien gunners, air torpedoes, a zeppelin, and other targets. In the one-on-one fighting portions both combatants stand in place while the player unleashes jabs and uppercuts at the enemy. Another area has you guiding the Rocket Ranger along the bottom of the screen, firing upward at an enemy fortress. The game was adapted from Cinemaware's graphically impressive 1988 computer game, in which Nazis built a base on the moon. References to Nazis and World War II were removed from this port, which also looks pretty good.

Notable Quotable:

"One of those games my parents found for me in the supermarket bargain bin and gave to me for my twelfth or thirteenth birthday . . . Not what I would call a great game. The graphics are so-so and the color scheme selection seems drab and uninspiring. The music isn't half bad . . . The gameplay is just okay." —vintagevideogamegeek (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"'Flying' is a generous statement. He looks like he's being guided by puppet strings while planes fly around him. You can shoot these planes down, but it would be in your best interest to avoid them . . . The strategy aspect of *Rocket Ranger* is the deepest and most interesting part of the game . . . One of *Rocket Ranger*'s strangest and most infuriating design decisions is to restrict your rocket fuel supply . . . should have just been a strategy game. Sending out your spies to retrieve information from around the world is intriguing, while the shooting portions are absolutely worthless." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



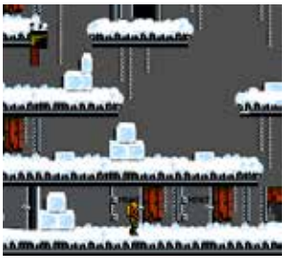
Insider Insight: *Rocket Ranger* received poor to middle-of-the-road reviews back in the day, but there's something about the old-fashioned serial style that I find appealing. In that way it made me feel like I was some sort of Flash Gordon or Indiana Jones!

I first played the game back in the '80s while staying at my sister's house, and I was drawn in by the goal of saving the heroine and her wacky scientist father, who I thought looked like Larry from The Three Stooges. I enjoyed the way that it started out with saving the heroine from initially being captured, buying even more time to complete the ultimate mission of thwarting the Leutonian Invasion. The individual missions were a good combination of finesse with the zeppelins and fighter planes, quick shooting with the Night Attack (as I called the area), and mind numbing, but somehow satisfying button mashing with the Fist Fights (as I called the area). Throw in the fact that you get to fly to the moon and attack Pseudo-Nazi She-Wolves of the SS and then finally the biggest googly-eyed main boss going and I just really enjoyed playing the game. I can easily beat *Rocket Ranger* now, but back in the '80s I felt like I had accomplished something special! —Papa Pete the Old Guy Gamer, YouTube personality

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Rocketeer

PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: Ironwind Software/Realtime Associates.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



Inspired by Disney's live action feature from 1991, this 8-bit adaptation casts players in the role of Cliff Secord, owner of the highly coveted rocket pack. Given the ability to run, jump, duck, and fly, Cliff, as a very nicely rendered Rocketeer, must rescue his girlfriend, Jenny, from Nazi spy and Hollywood heartthrob Neville Sinclair. The action takes place through six chapters (circa 1938), with Cliff punching, blowing up, and shooting such commonplace bad guys as brawlers, grenade throwers, kneeling shooters, and enemy rocket men. Cliff wields a pistol, a rifle, a spray gun, and a bazooka, as well as grenades. Ammo is limited, but you can grab more as you go; weaker weapons require fewer bullets in your arsenal, but firing the bazooka takes 15 bullets. You can also pick up hearts to replenish your health bar and gas cans to replace your fuel. As long as Cliff has some fuel he can fly around in his jet pack. His final battle is with Neville Sinclair himself. The enemies, despite some variation, are redundant, and the game is a little on the short side. However nice graphics, a fun sense of adventure (thanks in part to the freedom of flight), and good controls (Cliff can turn around and switch weapons while ducking) make *The Rocketeer* one of the more underrated movie-based titles for the NES.

Memories: The NES version of *The Rocketeer* is far superior to the SNES rendition, which was awarded "Worst Movie to Game" in *Electronic Gaming Monthly*'s standalone publication, the *1993 Video Game Buyer's Guide*. The award was for the game on "all systems," but the review references digitized graphics and "flying a plane around in a circle," which are aspects of the PC and SNES game, not the NES cart. In 1991, when I was working at Lone Star Comics, where I was exposed to Dave Stevens's gorgeous art in the *Rocketeer* comic books, I saw *The Rocketeer* feature film at the theater and thoroughly enjoyed it. The NES game captured some of that magic.

Notable Quotable:

"Cliff has one life. If he loses all his health it's game over . . . thankfully Bandai wasn't sadistic. You have unlimited continues and short and easy-to-remember passwords for each level. The downside is you have to go back to the beginning of the level if you die, or the checkpoint, which is quite far in some of these rather long levels. And you will die easily . . . Graphically the game is okay. The levels look great, and they try their best at using the limited palette . . . My only real issue comes from the sprites, which are way too tiny . . . great music . . . the control could be a tad bit more tweaked . . . but it's still fun." —Raymond Gallant (www.freakinawesomenetwork.net)

Insider Insight: Considering the basic premise of *The Rocketeer*—a guy finds an experimental jet pack and fights gangsters and Nazis—it sounds like perfect material for a video game. If you've ever had the displeasure of playing *The Rocketeer* on the SNES like I did, though, you found yourself competing mostly in tedious races and uninteresting shootouts rather than zipping through the sky with a rocket strapped to your back.

Luckily that wasn't the case for the NES version. I have fond memories of playing *The Rocketeer* the one time I rented it, and I was happy to discover those memories weren't just a case of looking back with rose-colored glasses. It's little more than a typical action side-scroller, but it's one of the more enjoyable licensed games for the NES.

Between-stage cutscenes, though not on the same level of the *Ninja Gaiden* trilogy, do a respectable job of telling the story from the film, and the game has far more Rocketeer-ing than its SNES counterpart. You have a healthy selection of weapons (though it can be cumbersome to cycle through them) and plenty of gangsters to shoot. Most importantly, you get to use your rocket boost to reach higher, out-of-reach platforms and large bosses, like a projectile-spewing helicopter. It would've been nice to have a few horizontal flying sequences, but the way in which the rocket is implemented here feels authentic to the film in that it's used sparingly. —Blair Farrell, owner and content generator for Comic Gamers Assemble, author of *The Web of Spider-Man Games: The Amazing and the (Not So) Spectacular*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rockin' Kats

PUBLISHER: Atlus.
DEVELOPER: Atlus.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

In this cute, fun, undeservedly obscure platformer, players guide a cool cat named Willy on a quest to rescue his girlfriend from Mugsy, a local crime boss. The fightin' feline, who looks dapper in tie and hat, must run, jump, and battle his way through five Prohibition-era levels: Downtown Street, Sky Ace, Playland, Western Adventure, and Channel 5 I ♥ New York. Willy is equipped with an unusual attack method: a boxing glove type weapon that extends accordion-like from his fist. Willy not only uses this punching mechanism to knock out anthropomorphic dog enemies (gangsters, desperados, ace pilots, and the like) as well as other animals, but he can also use it as a grappling hook to grab onto platforms, swing in circles, and propel himself to otherwise unreachable areas. The action scrolls vertically at times, there's a mine cart section, and certain platforms have conveyor belts, mixing up the action. Bonus mini-games, including roulette, pipe toss, and basketball, grant Willy money to purchase bombs, twin balls (every punch shoots out two balls), hammer punch, and jet sneakers (for flying longer and landing slower). There are bosses to battle as well, including an egg-emitting chicken, a bulldog band, and a giant, rock-dropping bird. *Rockin' Kats* looks and plays like a mainstream game but it is hard to find.

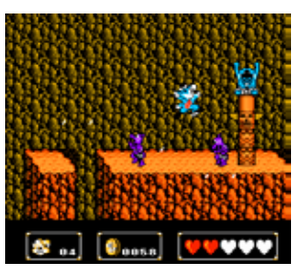
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

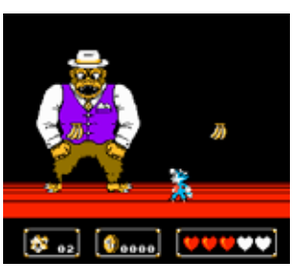
Notable Quotable:

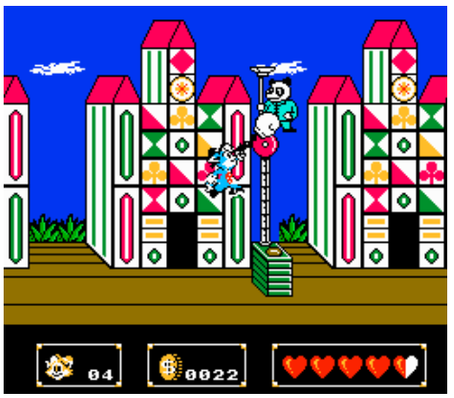
"A likable platformer that covers familiar territory, but does so with enough style to make it worth playing . . . The graphics are bright and cartoonish, with distinct locales such as an amusement park and the Wild West. Four out of the five levels are selectable at the beginning of the game as 'channels' on a television set, giving the game a less linear feel than most of its peers." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Rockin' Kats* isn't particularly difficult, especially if you have enough money after the first level to buy all the upgrades . . . The control is solid, with just a jump button and an action button . . . very responsive . . . charming . . . fun . . . While graphics, level design, and storyline are somewhat mediocre, the varied gameplay mechanics and the funky music are excellent. Hardcore retro gamers will probably find the game a bit too easy, but I still enjoyed my recent playthrough. It's become a cult classic that is causing its value to steadily increase. NES collectors playing it for the first time will not be disappointed." —A Link to Retro (www.alinktoretro.com)

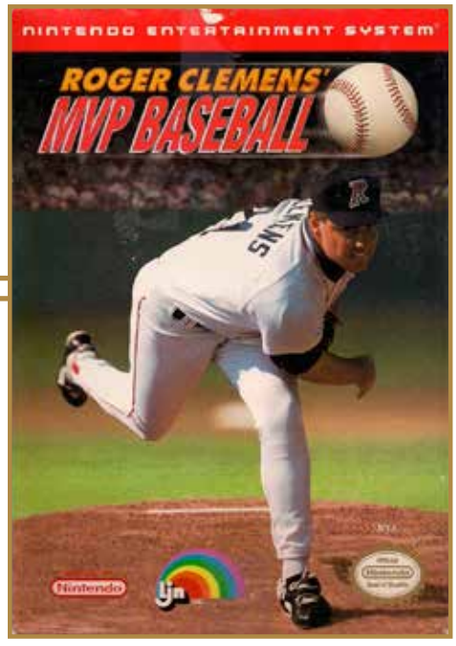






Roger Clemens' MVP Baseball

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



Get advice from "The Rocket" himself in *Roger Clemens' MVP Baseball*. Other than Clemens no other pros are featured, but the game does field 26 teams, each based on real Major League clubs, but with different (if similar) player and team names. For example, you can take the mound as Texas's R. Nolan (Nolan Ryan) and face one of Oakland's Bash Brothers, M. Bash or J. Bash (Mark McGwire and Jose Canseco). Like many baseball video games, this one sports a behind-the-catcher perspective during pitching and hitting. However, when the player is fielding, the view is from the field looking in toward home plate. You can dive and jump for the ball, pick off base runners, stop between bases, put in relief pitchers and designated hitters, steal bases, control the speed of pitches, move around at the plate, bunt the ball, slide into bases, and pitch curveballs, changeups, and fastballs. You can play an Exhibition game against the computer or another player, or a Regular Season against the computer, which includes a best-of-seven playoff championship series if your team qualifies. The manual for the game is noteworthy in that it has some nice color photos of Clemens, plus a cutout baseball card of the legendary pitcher.

Notable Quotable:
"This is probably the most original NES baseball game to date. The multiple angles are well done, but it will take some time to get used to them. The game knows baseball and plays one of the best versions to date. A very good version that isn't just a rehash of last year's game." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics are about as good as you'll find on the system . . . But nice graphics can't fix a game that's fundamentally broken. The controls in this game are simply abysmal . . . Batting is somehow even worse than fielding . . . a built in delay for hitters. Press the swing button, wait a half a second, and then you swing." —Adam Blank (www.thundermatt.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The control scheme is frighteningly horrid. The d-pad often represents which base you want to throw it to. If I'm in center outfield, staring at the infield, UP is home and RIGHT is 3rd base. Makes sense, right? Until you throw it to home plate, only to find out the buttons have now switched up on you, causing you to throw to the wrong base . . . Maneuvering around the bases is just as problematic and frustrating . . . There's something about the struggle of the fielding controls paired with the excitement of pitching that makes for a super fun time. You and your friend will both experience the exact same issues so the playing field is entirely level . . . a very playable and fun game with above average graphics, decent sound effects, and some very traditional baseball music." —Nerd Bacon (nerdbacon.com)

Insider Insight: *Roger Clemens' MVP Baseball* is a fun game that had the misfortune, at least in my collection, of appearing back-to-back on both the NES and SNES. It became one of the final NES games I acquired as a kid, and soon afterwards one of my first SNES games. Unsurprisingly I played the Super Nintendo version plenty and mostly left the original NES cartridge alone.

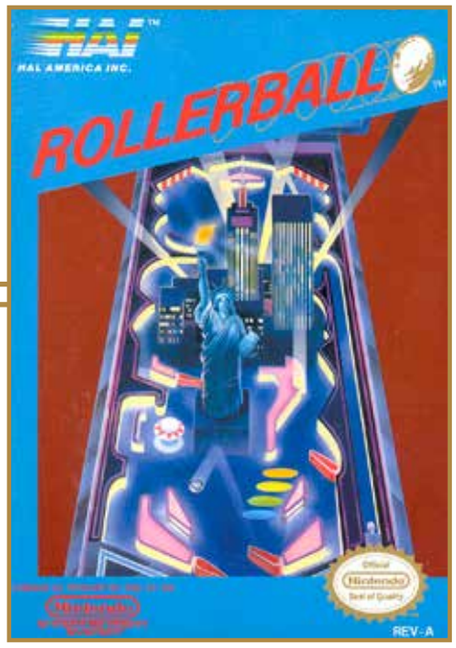
So what does that mean for the NES rendition? Unless you also own it on Super Nintendo, it's actually far from redundant. I wouldn't call it a slam-dunk classic like *Baseball Stars*, but it's quite an enjoyable game, albeit with fictional teams and players apart from Clemens himself. (Although, similar to some other Nintendo baseball outings, the players are modeled on actual MLB-ers and lightly disguised.) But the graphics, sound, and play mechanics are significantly advanced from first generation NES diamond titles like *Major League Baseball*.

And, much to the enjoyment for those of us who collected baseball cards, the NES version came with a nifty exclusive bonus: a cutout card of Clemens inside the instruction booklet. It's not worth much today, given the Rocket's continued Hall of Fame exclusion thanks to steroid-era controversies. But who knows—maybe someday he and Barry Bonds will finally get in and both the baseball card and this game will get a neat little uptick in recognition and desirability. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rollerball

PUBLISHER: HAL America.
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory.
GAME TYPE: Pinball, 1–4 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



Set against the New York City skyline, including the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building, *Rollerball* is a nicely programmed pinball sim that scrolls vertically, giving players four screens worth of playfield. Ball physics are on target (so to speak), the flippers work well, and the table is littered with a nice array of spinners, rebounders, holes, bumpers, letter targets, drop targets, and other staples of the genre. There's even a slot machine to aim for. Hitting the various targets exhibits a wide variety of results, such as opening gates, unlocking a bonus screen, increasing the score multiplier, turning the flippers invisible, or reversing the flippers. By performing certain tasks you can earn a free ball and unleash multiballs. Visually the game is fairly basic (NYC hallmarks are supplemented by clouds and blue skies), but gameplay is spot on. *Rollerball* also includes a cool two-player Matchplay mode where you compete by hitting targets located along the opponent's side of the board.

Notable Quotable:
"Besides the realistic pinball feel of the game and the colorful graphics, the best thing about *Rollerball* is that it won't tilt!" —*Nintendo Power* (May 1990)

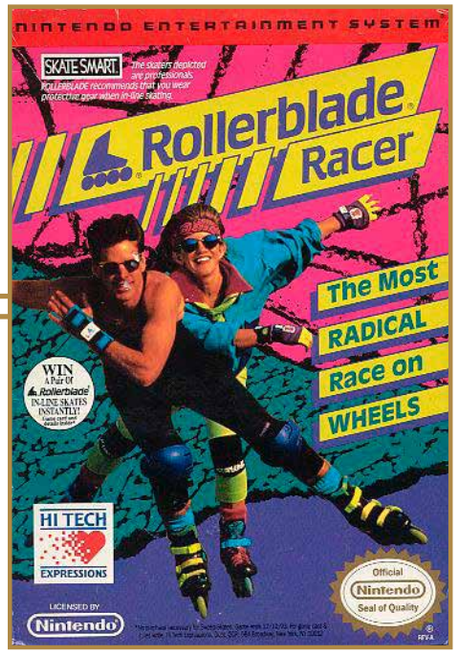
Notable Quotable:
"Brings home all the excitement of a pinball arcade . . . The simultaneous two-player action gets wild when the game shoots pinballs to both opponents . . . The graphics in the game are sharp . . . a simple contest, but offers a lot of fun and excitement." —*Computer Entertainer* (December 1989)

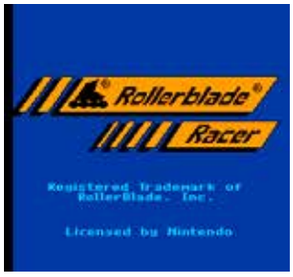
Notable Quotable:
"A great pinball game . . . The cool thing about *Rollerball* is its size. This is just a massive pinball table . . . a four-screen behemoth . . . the game does a lot of things well . . . beautiful . . . exciting . . . a lot of stuff to keep you busy . . . it's balanced, it plays well, it's got awesome 8-bit music." —CGR Undertow (YouTube)

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rollerblade Racer

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Radiance Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Inline Skating, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.





Strap on your inline skates and plug in this officially branded Rollerblade skating game. Viewed from an isometric overhead perspective, *Rollerblade Racer* has you guiding a kid named Kirk down suburban streets and other areas, doing tricks and skating around and/or jumping over such obstacles as barrels, children, Frisbees, manholes, water puddles, cracked pavement, and pink, seemingly hairless dogs. Kirk is fully decked out in protective clothing and brags that he just bought new gear. You can slow down and speed up, veer right and left, duck to maintain top speed, skate on stairs and sidewalks, and even skate backward. The objective is to beat the timer in each of the game's levels, in addition to scoring more than 5,000 points. There are four levels of play, each with a bonus round: The 'Burbs (with Barrel Jumping bonus round), City Street (The Cones), Hit the Beach (The Half-Pipe), and Panic Park (Super Rollerblade Challenge). Landing jumps earns points even when you aren't jumping over anything. The game, which is hard to find, evokes *Paperboy* to some degree (sans paper delivery), but there are enough differences to set it apart.

Memories: The Angry Video Game Nerd spotlighted *Rollerblade Racer*'s box art as being among the worst for the NES. The game came out in 1993, but the creators clearly had the '80s in mind when designing the box and cartridge label, with its bright pink aesthetic, unfashionable (by that time) clothing selections, and intertwined skaters who appear to be joined at the hip. Perhaps they never heard of the grunge movement.

Notable Quotable:

"Bland and bad . . . no charm about this game. It's like a depressing, inferior version of *Paperboy* . . . [The music] is so dreary and awful it sounds like they took the worst MIDI from a Color Dreams game and used it all throughout this game on a loop . . . It starts off pretty easy, but later [there are] too many obstacles and enemies in your way." — stanburdman (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"What's missing from this rollerblade race is the racing aspect, because there are no other competitors and it's not even much of a race against the clock; you *can* run out of time, but you get a fairly generous allotment . . . You don't even have to jump *over* things, and any successful landing will net you points so you might as well be jumping all the time . . . It's relatively competent on a technical level, with decent collision detection and controls that are heavy and sluggish, but not to a hugely frustrating degree . . . boring . . . It's not that terrible to play—I've certainly played worse—but the stodgy controls, ugly graphics, and lack of anything unique means it's destined for that great grey void where all the uninspired and forgotten console games end up." —VG Junk (retrovania-vgjunk.blogspot.com)

Insider Insight: Oh man, *Rollerblade Racer*. What stands out the most about this one is that bright and cheesy label. Despite how hilariously '80s it is (even though it came out in 1993), the game itself is actually not a bad effort. I've only procured this game recently, but I've enjoyed the time I've spent with it quite a bit. The isometric view takes a little while to get used to, but if you've played similar games like *720°*, this actually feels like a bit of a step up, at least in the control department. The various events featured here are fun to get through, especially when you try to push yourself to go as fast as you possibly can. I almost beat the game the first time I played it, but that won't keep me from playing it again. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

RollerGames

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

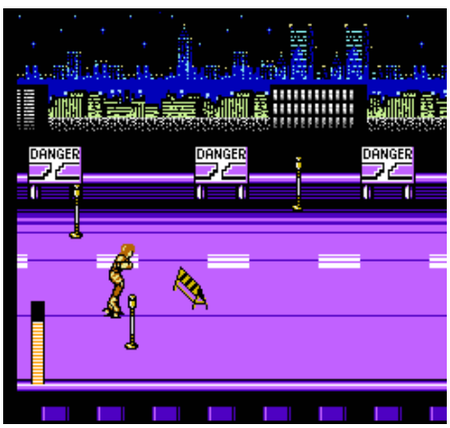
Inspired by the 1989–1990 TV show of the same name, *RollerGames* is a relatively obscure, *Double Dragon*–style brawler with the unusual distinction of most of the characters—heroes and villains alike—getting around via roller skates. As the T-Birds' Ice Box, the Hot Flash's Rolling Thunder, or the Rockers' California Kid you skate through six fun, challenging levels (two of which are auto-scrolling), punching and kicking such enemies as punks, dogs, and helicopters. By pressing A and B at the same time you execute your character's Patented Punishment Technique, which is a bone-crushing body attack, a head-spinning revolving jump kick, or a two-stage kick. You'll also jump over gaps, go up ramps, fight bosses (including Captain Meat Hook and Fish Face), and dodge manholes, rolling barrels, road signs, motorcyclists, and other obstacles. Levels include Downtown, The Night Highway, Automobile Processing Plant, The Regional Freeway, The Jungle River, and The V.I.P.E.R.'s Pit, the last of which is headquarters for the Vicious International Punks and Eternal Renegades.

Notable Quotable:

"*RollerGames* is segmented in the same manner as any of Konami's blockbusters, with great graphics, smooth scrolling, and bosses. What the game lacks, however, is a sense of purpose. It ends up short, with little of the *Double Dragon*–style action it is trying for." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"I was hoping the overall gameplay would be closer to roller derby as seen in Konami's arcade release, but *RollerGames* is very unique in being a side scrolling roller derby fighting game. Ultra had a knack for pushing the limits and this outing doesn't disappoint. They've stretched the limits of the NES and created a vibrantly colored game with great sound and smooth scrolling . . . a slick combo of genres with great graphics and sound along with an interesting mix of side-scrolling obstacles and vicious fights." —8-bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)



Insider Insight: As with many kids who grew up in the '80s, I was a huge fan of *WWF Superstars of Wrestling*. Naturally *RollerGames*, which was a show about roller derby, caught my eye, and watching people beat the hell out of each other while on roller skates filled the void for me in between *WWF* episodes. I quickly fell in love with *RollerGames*, and over time I grew more excited to watch it instead of my beloved *WWF*. I was gifted *RollerGames* on the NES the Christmas of 1990 and couldn't get the cartridge in my console fast enough. Confusion set in when I realized the game had nothing to do with the sport of roller derby and was actually a tough-as-nails beat-em'-up/platformer. At first I was pissed off, almost feeling as if I was taken advantage of, but then I realized how good the gameplay was and ended up playing it all day. Decades later I was going through a list of old arcade games to play on MAME (an arcade emulator) and came across the title *RollerGames*. I fired it up, thinking it would just be the arcade version of the NES platformer, but to my surprise it was actually an excellent game that was faithful to the sport! I still adore the NES game, but I would have been a hell of a lot happier if we got a port of the arcade version. —Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rolling Thunder

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Arc System Works.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.

Rolling Thunder is an excellent port of Namco's 1986 arcade classic. Purists may quibble over the skinnier characters, less colorful graphics, and the lack of a two-player alternating mode, but this is a fine game. On a mission to rescue the beautiful Leila, you, as a secret police agent, must walk quickly and jump (high jumps and long forward jumps) on platforms through treacherous passageways comprising buildings, caves, warehouses, lava fields, and command centers. You use your handgun, which fires one bullet at a time, to blow away hooded thugs, ninjas, ape men, lava men, panthers, flamers (when hit twice they break into four and attack), and bats with human faces. Enemies shoot at you, but you can duck under their bullets. Enemies also punch, run into you, and throw projectiles. Entering specially marked doors gives you bullets and machine guns, and unmarked doors sometimes hold extra time (yes, the levels are timed). *Rolling Thunder* is action packed, but you must progress carefully, making for a challenging game. Unlicensed and fairly uncommon for a mainstream arcade port.

Notable Quotable:
"Non-stop action for lovers of the genre . . . enemy agents coming from all angles . . . The graphics are okay . . . the figures are good sized, but rather 'stick-figured' with some blinking." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"*Rolling Thunder* is a tough game, but it's not so difficult that it becomes frustrating. Since most of the enemy characters appear in the same location it's essentially a pattern game, but the super graphics and strong gameplay make this one of my favorites in the genre." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Like the arcade version, *Rolling Thunder* will take hours of play to master. To handle many of the attackers you'll have to develop the correct movements and learn to respond quickly to a variety of attack styles. Although it's a 'shoot, shoot, shoot' game, firing blindly or wildly will usually lead only to the character's early death . . . The constant challenge—even in levels you've completed before—will keep players coming back for more." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"As you progress through the game you have to start making more and more precise jumps, as well as fight mutated enemies, birds, and panthers, which are really fast and hard to hit . . . the game gets mindbogglingly difficult. It stays really addicting and never gets to the point where you want to throw your controller due to a password option after every two stages you finish . . . It can get a tad repetitive . . . the arcade looks a tad sharper and is a lot brighter, but the NES really doesn't lose anything in the translation . . . The NES replicates the arcade's sound effects really well . . . The music also fits the mood of the game." —Doug Jackson (www.sega-16.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The Nintendo 8-bit version of *Rolling Thunder* is a pretty decent port. While the reduced detail makes everyone look even more like stick figures, the enemies lose their brightly colored uniforms and seem much less goofy as a result. The post level scenes of Leila are also gone, though the laughing Maboo is still present. The life bar has been reduced to two blocks, which more closely indicates how many hits the hero can actually absorb. The game is still incredibly difficult, though in different ways. Though there are far less enemies on the screen due to technical limitations, their patterns, especially the grenade throwers, are faster than the arcade version and require more precise timing. Though there are limited continues, the game does issue passwords so you can skip ahead to the second story. Incredibly enough the American release of *Rolling Thunder* actually had a pretty cool cover that combined the two main selling points of the game (guns and saving damsels) into one great package." —Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Insider Insight: This isn't a game I'd pick myself, but it turned out to be more fun than it looked. My friend's older brother was clearly invested in side-scrolling games that made him feel like a tough guy and *Rolling Thunder* fed his early teen angst. Lots of shooting, rooms full of bullets, and a sweet soundtrack to kill to. Of course eleven-year-old girls playing it was a totally different experience. "His legs are the same color as his head. Is he shooting those—aliens? Guys in masks? Without any pants on?" "Maybe they're fashionable KKK members and he's hoping they can help him find pants for his freakishly long legs?" If we had the box for the game and could read the backstory of Agent Pantsless we might have felt differently about his level of manhood. "Do we have to shoot a freakin' PANTHER?"

After each area we were rewarded with angry aliens hitting computers and showing us an anime woman. "Are we saving her?" "The aliens wear masks because they're self-conscious about their Green Goblin faces!" The timer was a pain. We'd laugh so hard we'd get distracted and panic because time was running out. Eventually we realized the aliens were showing us the same pictures of the woman and we questioned whether she was even still alive. We had no way to request they photograph her with today's newspaper as proof and we still had no pants. We could only continue shooting our way through weird lasers and jungles. Until we reached Geldra, where we found the woman we were trying to save was now blonde? "Really? No one else has questioned this?" "At least the alien leader is the same height as we are?" "Did we win? Why are the aliens clapping and dancing?" —Krystle Tiedeman, Librarian, Producer of *The King of Arcades*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Romance of the Three Kingdoms

PUBLISHER: Koei.
DEVELOPER: Koei.
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–8 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.

Adapted from the groundbreaking 1985 Japanese computer game *Sangokushi*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is set during civil war-torn second-century China, putting you in the role of one of many warlords trying to unify the 58 states of the country. Gameplay consists primarily of managing numbers, each number representing the statistical attributes of a general or a state. Generals are rated according to such factors as age, health, IQ, weapons, and number of soldiers in their unit, while states are rated according to gold in the treasury, rice in the storehouse, vulnerability to disasters, number of castles, land value, number of generals, and the like. Actions include moving men and generals, attacking neighboring states, giving presents to generals, planting fields, building dams, training armies, buying weapons, transporting assets, and much more. You can select from five scenarios: Chaotic World, The Emergence of Cao, The Opening of a New Age, The Battle of Red Wall, and The Age of the Three Kingdoms. The two main viewpoints are an overhead map and a game board/battlefield made up of squares.

Notable Quotable:

"Not a game for every NES owner—certainly not for those who prefer fast action—but it is made for order for the typically older and more serious gamer looking for a major intellectual challenge . . . a superb piece of programming that will keep strategic gamers happily occupied for many months." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"For a game based on a book with so much political intrigue there is surprisingly little to do. The player will often feel a sense of overwhelming boredom while playing *Romance*, grinding the same actions without getting any real feel of accomplishment. This isn't RPG grinding, where an hour of work can show a noticeable difference in combat prowess as you lay waste to a tricky boss; the grinding in *Romance* may simply net you a few extra points of damage in combat . . . there is strategy in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*; it is simply difficult to extrapolate when you are falling asleep in your chair . . . It is never 'bad' in any sense of the word; it has just soured with age." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

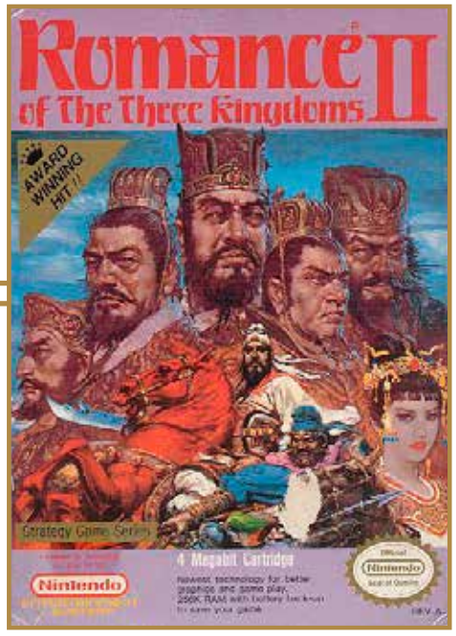
Notable Quotable:

"Visually *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is not as impressive as some other popular NES titles, but the game is more focused on resource management and battle, and is largely menu-driven . . . The environments are well-drawn, and you don't have to guess what kind of terrain each square is . . . The game's main theme is a masterpiece. I still remember the first time I heard it as a lad of 10. It sent a shiver up and down my spine and can only be described as hauntingly beautiful . . . The battle theme is also very good . . . You can hear wood being chopped, grass rustling, and swords slicing. In a game that presents a few rough spots in the graphics department the music and sounds do much to pick up the slack . . . it's imperative to consult the instruction booklet beforehand . . . can be fun, but it requires extraordinary time commitment, and is definitely a niche interest . . . People who prefer lots of action will find this game incredibly boring . . . people who love micromanagement will find much to appreciate." —Steve Schoen (www.geeksundergrace.com)

©SCHEZER PUBLISHING

Romance of the Three Kingdoms II

PUBLISHER: Koei.
DEVELOPER: Koei.
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–12 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



Another complex outing by Koei, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms II* is similar to the first game but with some improved features, including a better looking, nonscrolling battle map and some new tactical maneuvers, such as planning a joint invasion with another ruler against a third country. With the goal of expanding your empire across ancient China you'll perform such actions as recruit generals, appoint governors, do some farming, hire and train soldiers, buy rice, horses, and weapons, build dams and waterways, and position your troops. You choose your character stats at random by rolling virtual dice. Six all-new scenarios are available, each varying according to difficulty, challenges to overcome, and character placement: Dong Zhuo Seizes Loyang; Rivals Struggle for Power; Aged Liu Bei Hides; Cao Covets Control of China; Nation Breaks into 3 Divisions; and The Three-Way Contest. Battles take place on a traditional grid setup, with each side taking turns issuing orders and moving their troops. Patient gamers with a taste for strategic, slowly paced maneuvering will thoroughly enjoy the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* franchise. Unfortunately this sequel is much harder to find than the first game.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are not the strongest thing about the game. However, the portraits of each character and the brighter menus are a big improvement over the first *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and do help add some life into a very stat-driven game. The sound also isn't great but definitely fits the theme of the game . . . has a big learning curve and in the end isn't for everyone because it is so statistically driven. However, the game is very deep, with all the nuances you would think there would be in trying to unify and manage a growing empire." —GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

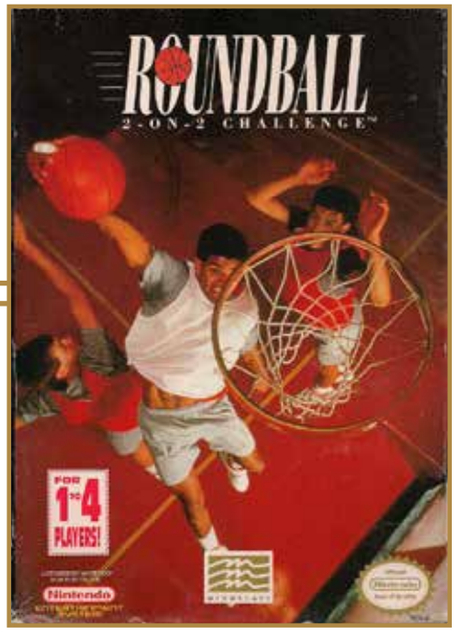
Notable Quotable:

"The original *Rot3k* is, perhaps, the best introduction to Koei's gaggle of historical simulations. There's enough content to please the hardcore Koei fans, yet it has a rare introductory curve that's perfect for potentially overwhelmed players. *Romance II* is slightly more difficult. It maintains the first game's balancing act—go to war and battle for other generals' territories while keeping the home front strengthened—while introducing a wider variety of menu options for you to pore over: Diplomacy! Internal Affairs! The new options add more meat to an already beefy game, and as if that weren't enough, you now have the ability to create custom characters. The characters can be placed in unoccupied provinces for an additional challenge or you can play as one yourself. Until you get good at the game I'd avoid them altogether. If you play as a custom character you have to start with a bare bones amount of goods: little rice, little gold, no extra generals—not the ideal setting for newcomers . . . The soldiers' and peoples' morale is still important (if you don't keep them happy they might riot), but it's not a top priority like it was in the first game." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

SCHOLASTIC PUBLISHING

Roundball: 2-on-2 Challenge

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Park Place Productions.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



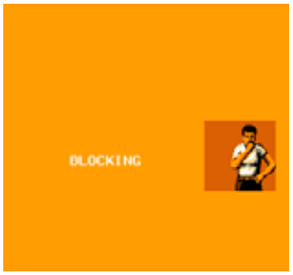
As you might surmise by the title, *Roundball: 2-on-2 Challenge* lets you engage in a little two-on-two basketball. However, there's also the option to play one on one. The elevated camera shows the game from behind the three-point line, giving you a nice view of the half court action. Many of the real rules of basketball are enforced, including three seconds in the key, 24-second shot clock violation, goal tending, traveling, and out of bounds. Players can dribble, shoot (including free throws, dunks, hook shots, and layups), pass (including jump passes), rebound, steal, block shots, and enter four preset plays (including setting picks and posting up). Options include quarter-length, Tournament mode, and eight selectable teams. Stats are displayed after each period, but they don't become part of the players' permanent records. Includes voice samples such as "blocking," "three minutes," and "take it back." While *Roundball* is far less well known than such popular releases as *Double Dribble* and *Tecmo NBA Basketball*, it's a worthy addition to your NES hoops collection.

Notable Quotable:

"The sport has converted well onto the NES. All the visuals are excellent with some nice animation . . . isn't much fun on your own, but as a four-player extravaganza it's great . . . average music and sound effects . . . a fun basketball sim with some neat sequences . . . Basketball at its best on the NES." —*N-Force* (November 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"I understand what the development staff was trying to do with this one: Create a half court basketball sim video game that tried to convey the streetball or pick-up scene more than the professional or NBA scene, complete with take-backs, two-on-two action, ballers to choose from, and stripped down rules. The execution is just so lacking, though. The gameplay feels unfinished. One prominent example: Play the computer and try to defend against a dunk. The opposing player just moves right through your guy, like he is barely there. Your best hope is to pick someone with a good stealing ability, yet getting too aggressive with steal attempts draws a foul. In fact, it seems like the programmers realized this discrepancy so they give the player three different options as to how easy it is to steal the ball. This should be a big red flag to anyone wondering if the gameplay is balanced and fun . . . Maybe it's because I myself greatly enjoyed the streetball scene for years and still love pick-up ball, but *Roundball* just doesn't do it for me." —Eric Bailey (nintendolegend.com)



SCHEER PUBLISHING

Rush'n Attack

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.

Dozens of American POWs are being held inside a heavily armed base. To free the captives and destroy the base you, as a special forces soldier, must run, jump, climb (up and down ladders), duck (under enemy fire), and battle your way through six short but difficult stages: Iron Bridge and Missile Base; Airport; Harbor; Forest and Airshed; Warehouse; and Enemy Base. The brave man you control is armed with a knife, but he can pick up weapons (bazookas, hand grenades, pistols, and invincibility shields) dropped by an onslaught of foot soldiers, artillerymen, machine gunners, and other enemies that attack from both sides. To defeat the jump-kicking enemies you should jump straight up and stab them. Bosses to battle include jumping soldiers, rocket men, attack dogs, autogyros, and parachute troops. *Rush'n Attack* is a port of Konami's Cold War–era classic (get it, "Russian Attack"?), which was released to the arcades in 1985. In Japan and Europe the arcade game was released as *Green Beret*.

Notable Quotable:

"The animation and use of color isn't as good as it might have been; the backdrops have good detail but soldier sprites are bland . . . always playable . . . relies on the great two-player action to overcome its not-so-hot in-game appearance. Ignore the aesthetics and get blasting those Russians!" —*The Games Machine* (June 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"NES version outshines C64 version . . . Graphics are more sharply detailed and feature better animation. Sound effects are more realistic and the music is more stirring, adding a sense of urgency to your mission. The game itself seems more lively on the Nintendo system . . . a superb two-player game." —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"Though this is a fairly simplistic beat-'em-up, its senseless violence makes it quite a compulsive game to play, and in that respect it's accurate to its coin-op parent. The graphics and sound are adequate rather than outstanding, but they do the job and help make this a bloody enjoyable roughhouse romp." —*Complete Guide to Consoles IV* (1990)

Notable Quotable:

"The display scrolls horizontally at a reasonably smooth pace. The various characters move jerkily, but this is hardly surprising, since only two frames of animation are used in the running movement . . . the action shifts along very quickly and there's so much going on all the time that when you are attacked from all quarters it can be hard keeping up with the pace. The backgrounds are brilliant, with some of the best graphics available on the NES, despite the tedious tune which insists on accompanying them throughout the game . . . The enemy soldiers all come at you in roughly the same place with each game, which means that you can spend time working out how to get around certain problems . . . the option for simultaneous play with a second player is one of the game's best features." —*Zero* (December 1989)

Insider Insight: As a child I had bad allergies. Thankfully nothing life threatening, but I recall countless bouts of hay fever. Ultimately my parents sought an allergist's intervention, and sometime around fourth grade (circa 1987) they brought me to the doctor to commence a regimen of regular allergy shots. Which, in typical fashion for a nine-year-old, I absolutely dreaded.

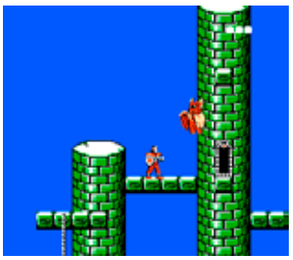
I must have raised quite a fuss because, quite uncharacteristically, my mother promised to buy me a new Nintendo game after the initial shots hurt and itched so badly. (Usually I received NES games only on special occasions, such as birthdays and Christmas.) This is how I ended up with one of my all-time childhood favorites, *Rush'n Attack*.

A year later, in fifth grade creative writing, we were tasked with an assignment to describe "A Challenge I've Had." To this I penned a short essay on enduring the pain of the allergy shots and receiving *Rush'n Attack*. It received a "check plus" mark from the teacher. Utterly contrary to conventional wisdom of the time, at least in this one instance I can truly say Nintendo helped me get better grades in school! —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Rygar

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.

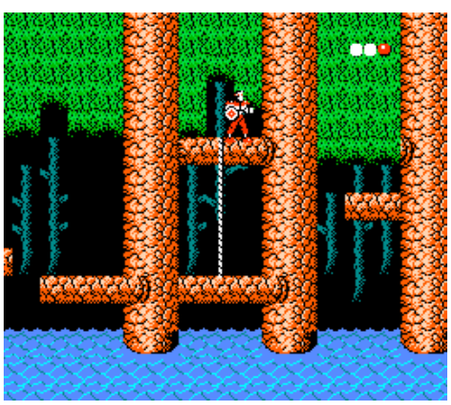


In this reimagining of Tecmo's 1986 arcade game you control Rygar, the legendary warrior of Argool. Your objective is to defeat the evil king and his army of creatures, including such beasties as Molgolin, who flies and chases you; Demorobruzer, a monster on a tank; Olbis, which flies up in the air and swoops down for the attack; Kuzeelar, a giant snail that discharges acid mucus; and Super-robot Bargan, who unleashes electromagnetic super waves. The game takes nice advantage of the console format, adding nonlinear gameplay and various RPG elements to the running, jumping, side-scrolling action. You'll travel through open-ended mountains, towers, and palaces (there are several horizontal areas and one vertical overhead area connected by doorways) using Rygar's speedy Diskarmer, which resembles a giant yo-yo, as a weapon and climbing tool. He can also meet a "legendary God" to get a grappling hook. Rescuing various gods grants Rygar five additional items: a wind pulley (ability to walk a rope stretched between two wooden stakes), a crossbow (allows a rope to be stretched when Rygar reaches the stake of a tree with no rope wrapped around it), a coat of arms (makes Rygar qualified to receive medicine for physical strength recovery), a suit of armor, and the flute of Pegasus (the sound of which is said to work miracles). Killing certain monsters increases Rygar's spiritual strength for stretching the grappling hook, destroying all onscreen enemies, or recovering physical strength.

Memories: In 1987, the US video game magazine industry had yet to recover from the Great Video Game Crash of 1983, so there weren't many options for reading NES game reviews. As such, I usually had to rely on word of mouth and box art/screenshots to determine if a game was worth checking out. *Rygar* looked pretty cool in the store, so I asked for and received it for Christmas 1988. I was impressed with the game's graphics and production values and I enjoyed playing it, but I was a little disappointed that it wasn't a 100% straightforward action game, as that was my favorite genre. In fact, I still prefer a linear, uncomplicated experience over a more convoluted game. Little did I know that the coin-op version of *Rygar* was just that, as I never got a chance to play it back in the day.

Notable Quotable:
"As quests go this game is pretty pedestrian. It's not as complex as *Wizards & Warriors*, nor is the shooting as quick as in *Gauntlet*. The scenery's quite handsome, however, and the colors and animation are also fine." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"*Rygar* was one of my favorite NES games as a kid. I loved its side scrolling and adventure mixture. I do not know if I ever beat it as a kid, but I do remember it was very hard. Coming back and visiting it almost 30 years later was fun, but the game is not as hard as I remember it. The main thing that I think makes one perceive this game as hard is the lack of saves. If you die you can continue on at the beginning of your current level, with all your gear, but if you turn your console off it is game over . . . I, in fact, left my console running for days as I worked my way through the game. This strategy was working well until my console froze. I was about two-thirds through the game and a few hours invested prior to the freeze. Once I restarted the game I noticed that the whole world was laid out in the manual. Not only did it show you where each level was, it showed you where each item was. This, plus the fact that I had already played through a good portion of the game, made the second run through go a lot quicker. In about three hours I had the game beat." —Will's Gaming Blog (willballblog.wordpress.com)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

S.C.A.T.: Special Cybernetic Attack Team

PUBLISHER: Natsume.
DEVELOPER: Natsume.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.

The president has gathered a group of brilliant scientists to help protect Earth against an alien invasion. From their labs the scientists create the Special Cybernetic Attack Team, a pair of warriors who are part human, part machine. These two beings have been designed to capture and adapt alien technology and weapons and use them against their attackers. As either Arnold or Sigourney (note the nods to Schwarzenegger and Weaver), you fly around and shoot Shock Troopers and alien ships, including drone blasters, super lasers, quad killers, missile ships, auto-cannons, and excavation drones. The action scrolls primarily from left to right and each hero has the same abilities. The action takes place in the ruins of New York City, the Subterranean Realm, The Astrotube, The Battleship, and The Orbiting Platform, where you must confront the most dangerous invaders, among them Vile Malmort, the alien leader. You can upgrade your standard weaponry and your abilities by shooting enemies that contain items and then collecting those items, which include speed, lasers, wide beams, bombs, and recover (restoration of some of your lost energy). Twin satellites maneuver around your armament as you go and they can be locked into place for steady aiming.

Notable Quotable:

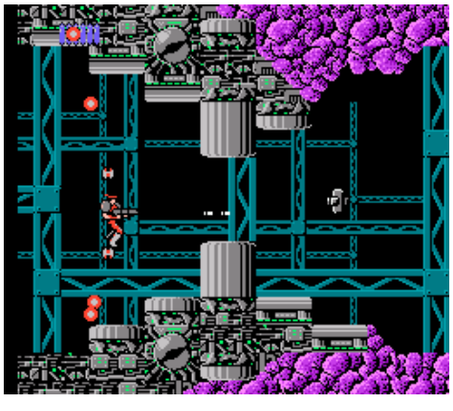
"Natsume's first release of a NES game in America doesn't break any new ground in the storytelling, but the five blistering levels of action and exciting two-player option will keep action fans glued to their TVs." —*Nintendo Power* (April 1991)

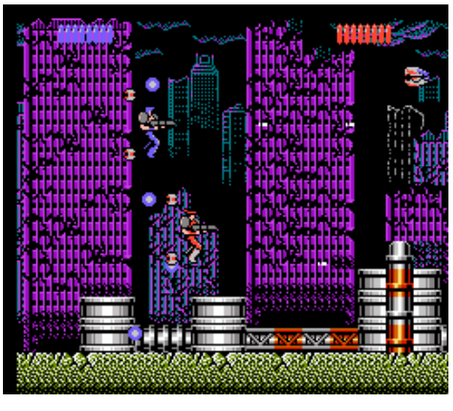
Notable Quotable:

"*S.C.A.T.* takes the basic theme from *Forgotten Worlds* and throws it onto the NES! The action is intense, and the game only suffers from a lack of visual clarity caused by some flicker when too much is going on. Still, it's a nice addition to the library and a good example of a good NES game." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"*S.C.A.T.* obviously has some familiar features about it, but is nonetheless a well-crafted and enjoyable game. The graphics are interesting, with variable scrolling and little flicker. The soundtrack is equally good throughout—explosions, music, and all. Unlimited continues are available that, when used, start you at the beginning of the round, but the game shouldn't be particularly difficult for the average player. In all it's a fun game that should be given a look." —*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (May 1991)

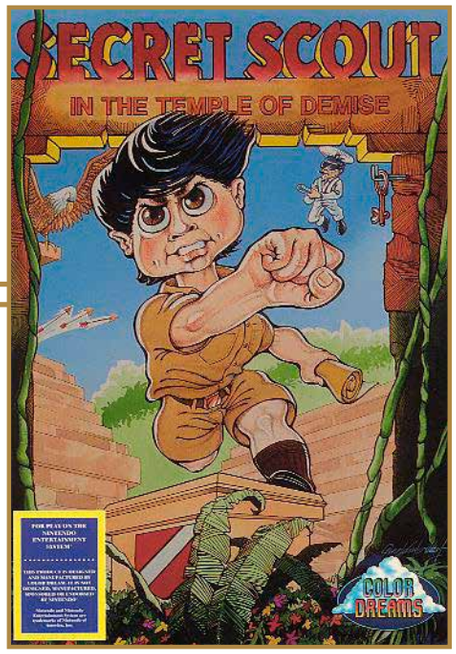




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Secret Scout in the Temple of Demise

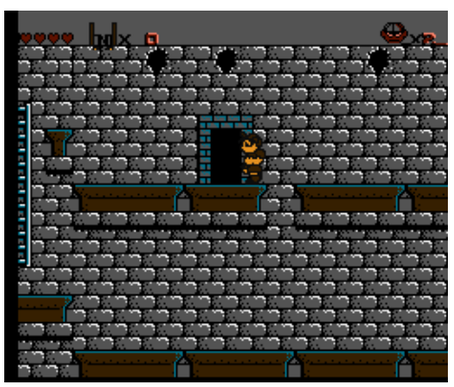
PUBLISHER: Color Dreams.
DEVELOPER: Color Dreams.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



In *Secret Scout*, you guide a chubby little boy scout who has been separated from his troops back to civilization. The scout runs, climbs ladders, jumps on platforms, and leaps over pits, and he can pick up such items as a map, rope, shields (for temporary invincibility), torches (for lighting up dark rooms), keys (for opening gated doors), boomerangs, and dynamite (for opening sealed doors, attacking enemies, and performing a super-jump). He can also acquire brass knuckles for added strength and suction cups for walking on walls when going across tricky canyons. Unfortunately the so-called Secret Scout's primary weapon is a silly looking short range kick that is weak and ineffectual. This makes the Indians, guards, gangsters, archers, ninjas, pirates, skeletons, and other enemies, which have such names as Barney Basher, Evil Eagle, and Judy Jake, difficult to defeat. Some of the names are ethnically insensitive, such as Crazy Native and Spud Arrowhead. And don't get me started on the Dodo Dwarfs gang. The action takes place amidst jungles, temples, and other such locales, and the enemies attack with a variety of weapons, including daggers, a rifle, a sword, grenades, and a machine gun. You must also watch out for such hazards as "killer boings" (bouncing balls), stone missiles, prongs of death, and flying saucers that drop green glop balls on your head. Unlicensed and rare.

Notable Quotable:

"Most enemies in the game take multiple hits to kill. With your short range you must go RIGHT in front of them to hit . . . You'll be knocked far for each hit you take . . . fighting enemies while jumping across platforms with many pits is not fun . . . Areas will instantly change as you walk through them. One miraculous door leads you from a forest to a city. This makes the game seem unrealistic and fake, but the different areas are probably the best part of the game . . . Other than the environment and graphics, which are just below mediocre, everything else is awful . . . To use a tool you must press select and the d-pad, both on the left side of the controller. What the hell is this? The game creators expect you to cramp your hands over to use something like a map or dynamite to create a super jump. It's a terrible concept . . . The music in the game is poor quality, just like everything else. There are very few tracks and they all sound the same. They're all equally bad." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Section Z

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.

Taking place in the "futuristic" twenty-first century (would it have killed the story writers to put the game in the twenty-second or twenty-third century?), *Section Z* casts you as lone astronaut and freedom fighter Captain Commando, who dons a jet-propelled supersonic spacesuit and multidirectional weaponry. You must fly through tunnels of rock and industrialized metal, firing left and right at clone soldiers, missile drones, metal crabs, mechanical eyeballs, spiral gunships, and other enemies. At the end of each level you must select one of two routes, which is a frustrating nonlinear element (pointlessly repeating earlier levels is a given) not found in Capcom's 1985 arcade original. In addition, the vertically scrolling levels have been removed and the steady stream of grenades has been replaced by an oddly configured (not to mention ineffectual) missile-firing technique in which pressing A and B simultaneously makes the missile appear in the center of the screen. (Pressing A and B individually fires left and right, respectively.) Other changes were made as well, including the addition of shields, but no health meter. At first glance *Section Z* is a typical side-scroller, with reasonable challenges, lots of shooting, and solid visuals, but the objectives are needlessly confusing (especially relative to the genre), a situation not helped at all by the instruction manual. The first run of the game was packaged with a helpful map, which is now rare and sought after by collectors.

Notable Quotable:

"Narrowly avoids the scrap heap and manages to scrape in as a game worth playing if you can't find anything else. Alright for a bit of shooting practice, but that's all it's got to offer." —*Total!!* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"It's called *Section Z* because in the original arcade version you have to make your way through 26 alphabetically labelled levels. But in the NES version they have labelled the levels with a number from 1 to 60, which kind of makes the game's name stupid . . . The graphics are nice. It's easy to see where you can fly and what is a wall. Each level has its own distinct look and colors . . . With a whole heap of weapons available, and the ability to upgrade both weapons and your player, it's a pretty cool game . . . fairly difficult, but if you persist at it you will gain the skills you need to complete it." —Retrospekt (www.retrospekt.com.au)

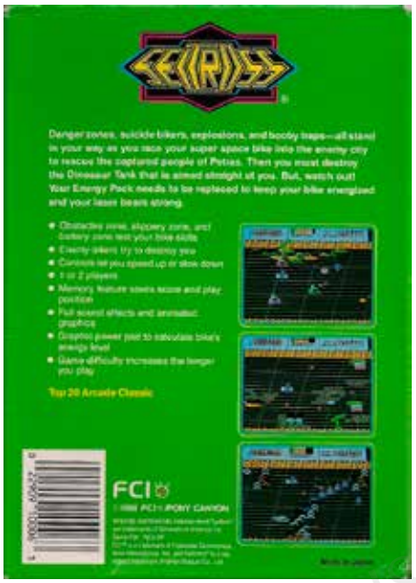
Notable Quotable:

"I can't comprehend how anyone could derive enjoyment from this lame ass side-scrolling shooter. *Section Z* not only features endless tunnels that all look the same, but the enemies are equally forgettable. Button B fires right and button A shoots left, but you'll need to tap them constantly to fire repeatedly (ugh) . . . remarkably your health isn't displayed anywhere on the screen . . . Determining where each exit leads requires trial and error, and you'll often inadvertently return to areas you've already completed . . . places you in impossible situations in the early going . . . I couldn't find any redeeming qualities in this clunker." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

© SCHILLER PUBLISHING

Seicross

PUBLISHER: FCI.
DEVELOPER: Nihon Bussan.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1988.



From the arcades (1984, Nichibutsu) to your home comes *Seicross*, a side-scrolling motorcycle shoot-'em-up. Those nasty Basrahs have attacked the peaceful Petras of the planet Colura. While hiding underground the Petras developed the Gilgitt Petras, a laser-shooting miniature rescue bike. Your job is to ride the Gilgitt through three worlds, destroying motorcycle-riding Basrahs while saving the defenseless Petras. You can avoid, bump, or shoot the Basrahs and they can bump you into obstacles, including terrain. During your mission you will be surrounded by strange plants, weird creatures, and unusual obstacles including energy cannons, dinosaur fossils, rock cannons, aliens, and living bombs. Shoot or avoid everything in sight. Your bike is destroyed if you are hit by an enemy projectile, crash into a wall or other obstacle, or if you run out of energy. You can retrieve extra energy by picking up energy packs that appear along the course. To power up your laser beam, destroy a Radar Bouy and then grab the Power Star that will appear. If you can make it through the Obstacle Zone, the Slippery Zone, and the Battery Zone you will enter Space City and challenge the BalTank, a super-powerful Dinosaur Tank. *Seicross* is a fast, challenging, forced-scrolling game, and the music does a good job of keeping pace with the action. In fact, the game probably moves a little too fast. It would be nice if you could slow down from time to time and shoot more obstacles. Too many of the plants, creatures, and such pass by without you getting a chance to destroy them. Parts of the track are sparse, but the alien plants and most of the other obstacles are nicely detailed. Overall this is a solid representation of the genre.

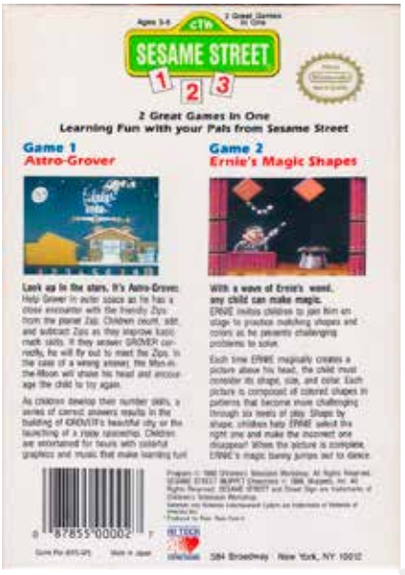
© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics and sound effects of *Seicross* are definitely above average and do a good job of backing up the fast moving gameplay. I like the gameplay of this game a lot, especially because it requires you to use multiple strategies to overcome each of the different areas. It's a play-and-learn process that is rewarding and fun, as you discover the best techniques needed to pass through each zone. *Seicross* isn't an overly complicated game, but it does have enough of those addictive qualities that made it an arcade sleeper that warrants closer inspection . . . some shooter fans may be turned off by the intense combination of driving and targeting." —*Electronic Game Player* (September/October 1988)

Sesame Street 123

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Math/General, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



Featuring cute graphics, charming music, and a kid-friendly approach to making learning fun, *Sesame Street 123* contains two separate games, along with a number of variations. In Ernie's Magic Shapes, a shape or item composed of shapes appears above Ernie's head, and players must help Ernie select the correct shape or shapes that correspond to that image (the size and color of the shape can be determining factors). After the image has been completed, Ernie's magic bunny pops out of a hat and waves at the gamer. In Astro-Grover, players add, subtract, and count little green men called Zips, which hail from the planet Zap. A series of correct answers rewards players with the building of Grover's city, or with the launching of a spaceship. When the player gets an answer wrong he or she is gently informed and allowed to try again.

Notable Quotable:

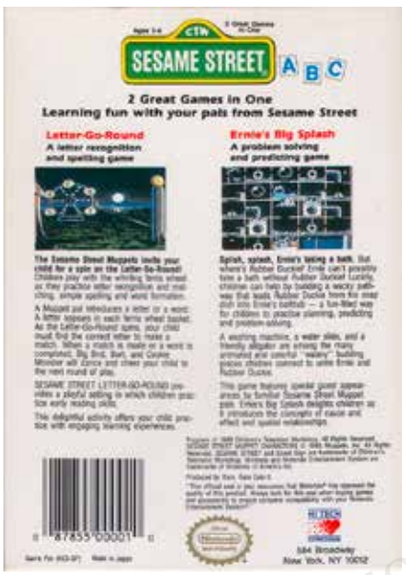
"Cute music, but it never varies from its few simple themes. On the other hand, your child will always know when he or she has gotten something right, since the same music always accompanies the correct answer . . . provides an excellent visual approach to math using a subject matter that most children can relate to . . . a good way to introduce mathematical concepts without the stress that might accompany classroom instructions . . . does a good job of teaching shape, color, and pattern identification while having some fun in the process. My kids enjoy both games and have continued to play them, even though they've been mastered." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

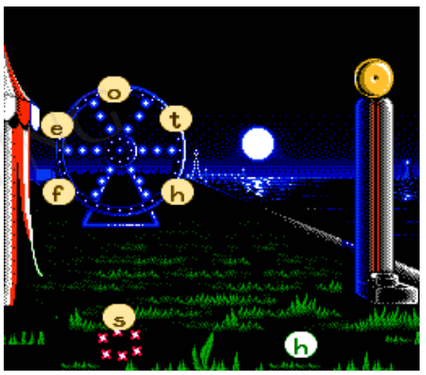
Insider Insight: *Sesame Street 123* was one of my first NES games, but not before I had some adventures with Link. My dad bought me *The Legend of Zelda* for my third birthday. As you might think, it was a bit much for my young mind to grasp. My mom made him take me back to the game store and get something a bit more appropriate for my age. That's how I first got hold of this game, and I had lots of fun times playing with Ernie and Grover. In retrospect, I think my dad knew that *The Legend of Zelda* would be too much of an undertaking for me and that maybe he was just looking for an excuse to pick up the hot new game. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

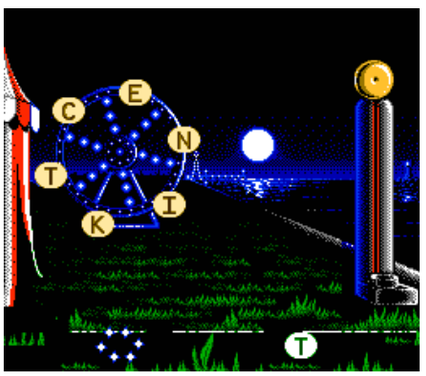
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Sesame Street ABC

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Spelling/General, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



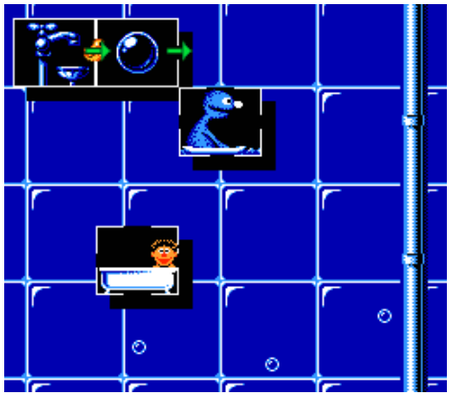




Based on *Sesame Street*, the long-running PBS children's television show, this cartridge features two distinct games (each with variations) designed for preschoolers. In Letter-Go-Round, a letter sits in each basket seat of a Ferris wheel. As the wheel spins kids must select the correct letters to spell words or create matches. Bert replaces letters on the wheel while Big Bird dances to celebrate correct answers. In Ernie's Big Splash, which is designed to help kids learn planning, problem solving, predicting, cause and effect, and spatial relationships, players use a washing machine, a water slide, a friendly alligator, and other building pieces to create a pathway leading Rubber Ducky from his soap dish into Ernie's bathtub. Both games offer a solid educational experience, as well as cute graphics and sounds.

Notable Quotable:
"My main problem with edutainment games is the lack of varied content. Once the child completes all the challenges, what's left for them to do? Recycle through the same tired material? In general children love repetition more than adults, but video games are a large monetary investment for adults. As such, edutainment games should come *stuffed* with learning. Unfortunately, a fifty-page word search book from the dollar store would provide more depth than this game. *Sesame Street ABC* isn't as child insulting as the *Fisher Price* series, but it doesn't raise the bar, either." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

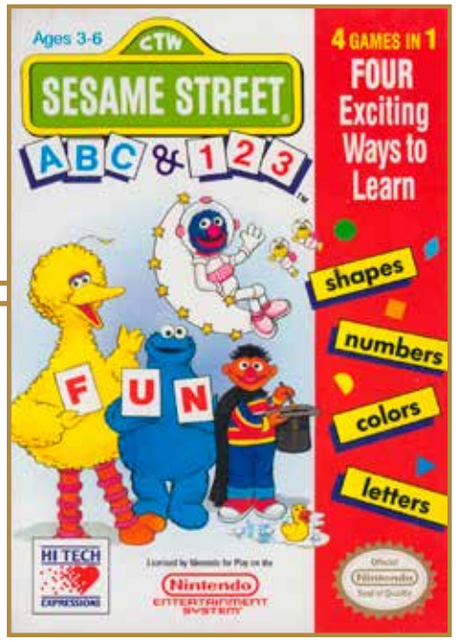
© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Insider Insight: I had a lot of fun with this one as a kid, specifically Ernie's Big Splash, which almost feels like a more kid-friendly version of the puzzle game *Pipe Dream*. Using the different fittings, you complete what is bound to be the wackiest plumbing system you'll ever see. Complete the connection and get the water to Ernie's bath to make him a happy guy! Even as an adult I'll sometimes pop this one in. It reminds me of simpler times and always puts a smile on my face. — Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

Sesame Street ABC & 123

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Spelling/Math/General, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

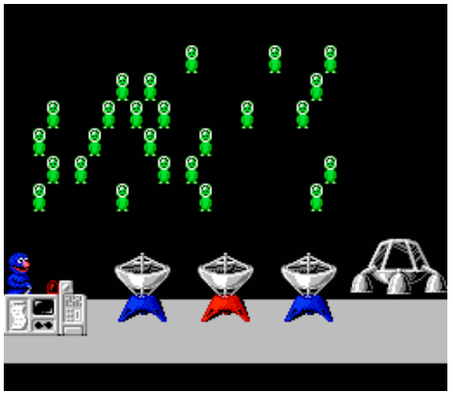


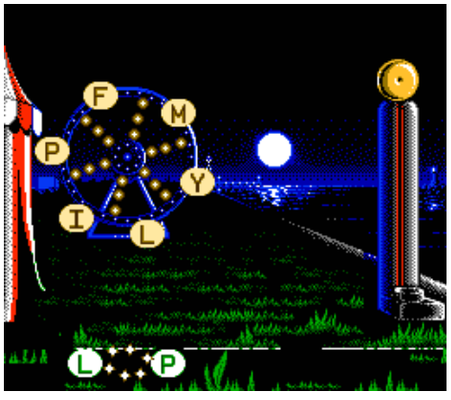
As its title suggests, this cartridge contains two previously released NES games: *Sesame Street ABC* and its math counterpart, *Sesame Street 123*. This means it contains Ernie's Magic Shapes, Astro-Grover, Letter-Go-Round, and Ernie's Big Splash—quite the bargain. Children learn about shapes, colors, letters, and numbers in a friendly, easily digestible format. Check each title's individual listing for gameplay details.

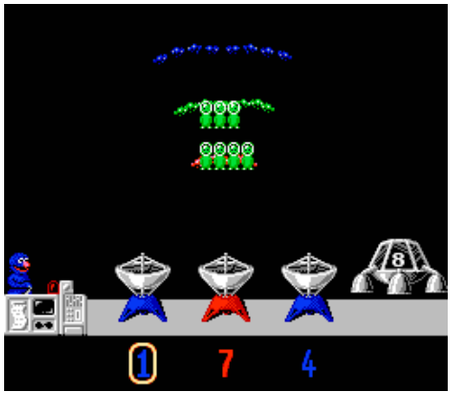
Memories: I was obviously way too old for the *Sesame Street* games when they came out for the NES, but I did grow up watching the show before I started going to school (in fact I got an extra year, since my mom didn't put me in kindergarten). The show fascinated me, and I suppose I learned something about ABCs and 123s, but I was particularly interested in the cultures (before I knew what the word meant) of the different children on the show. We never had tortillas in the house when I was a kid, so an episode showing kids eating them seemed exotic, as did the lives of kids who lived in the city. I was a country boy, and I thought it looked really cool living in high rise apartments, playing stickball in the streets, and being within walking distance of restaurants, stores, and movie theaters. *Sesame Street* really opened my eyes to kids that were much different than me.

Notable Quotable:
"Unlike *Donkey Kong Jr. Math*, which helped no one anywhere ever with their math skills, Astro Grover gently teaches children—using goofy aliens as markers—the fundamentals of basic counting . . . you'd be hard pressed to find better edutainment." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Insider Insight: If you're a fan of either *ABC* or *123*, you'll love *Sesame Street ABC & 123*.These games have a particularly strong significance for me, as I have both fond memories of playing them when I was a young child and new memories watching my own kid play them. I bought all the NES *Sesame Street* games when my wife and I found out she was pregnant with our son, and it was an absolute delight watching him play them when he was old enough to do so. Carry that torch, little man! —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality



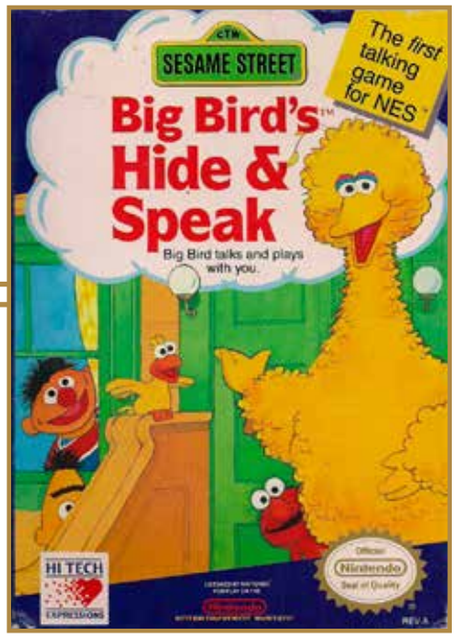




©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Sesame Street: Big Bird's Hide & Speak

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Riedel Software Productions.
GAME TYPE: Educational/General, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



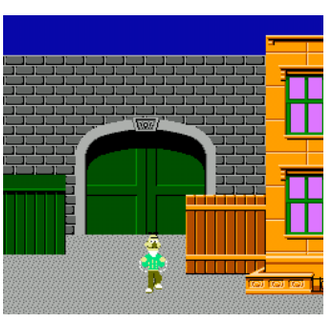
Starring the digitized voice of the late Carroll Spiney, who played Big Bird on the *Sesame Street* television series from its inception in 1969 until 2018, *Big Bird's Hide & Speak* is designed to teach children basic recognition, memorization (windows can be closed), and spelling skills. In each of the game's six modes of play Big Bird stands outside an apartment building that has four windows. Elmo, Ernie, the Count, and other characters enter the building and appear in the windows, and players must guide Little Bird (who acts as a cursor of sorts) to the correct window based on the clue that a computer-controlled Big Bird calls out, such as the character name, the letter accompanying the character, or a three-letter word.

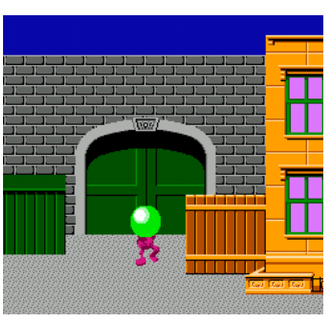
Notable Quotable:

"It is certainly understandable why a game based on a show that targets children who might not have the reading skill necessary to navigate game menus might want to include a voice guide, but this unexpected technical feat is utterly wasted on a game that puts no effort into any other part of its design . . . what few things this game tries to teach are presented in such a slow and boring manner that it's hard to believe a child would enjoy it more than a lecture from a teacher . . . Big Bird's voice is definitely recognizable . . . incredibly lazy game mode designs . . . doesn't teach the player about letters or how to spell so much as quiz them on what they learned from far more engaging and effective teaching methods . . . terribly dull, agonizingly slow, and a disservice to a TV show that tried to show children that learning can be enjoyable rather than a dry memorization process." —The Gaming Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

Insider Insight: This game claims to be the first digitized speaking game on the NES. I'm not sure if this is true, but if it is, it's pretty impressive and fares much better than some later games to feature voice synthesis. *Hide & Speak* revolves around character identification and memory. The player participates in a hide-and-seek game where the characters are outlined and hide in buildings along Sesame Street. The game makes it relatively easy for young players to understand what is expected of them. There are also different difficulty levels to cater to the ability of the player. And hey, who doesn't like Big Bird? —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

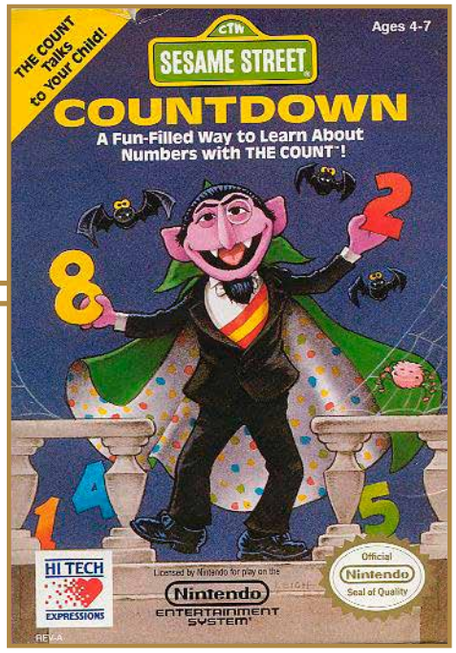
©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

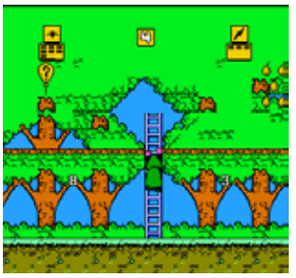




Sesame Street Countdown

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Riedel Software Productions.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Math/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



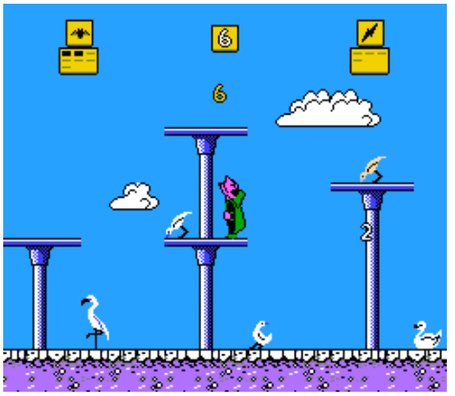


A wheel of numbers begins spinning and players, as the Count, must jump up to touch a number. For the rest of the level, side-scrolling action ensues, in which Count walks along looking for representations of that touched number, such as groupings of smiley faces, or ice cream cones, or the actual numeral itself. If you select Hop mode, Count automatically hops to each grouping or numeral, meaning the player's job is to simply figure out the correct number. In Run mode players must guide Count to the numbers. Unfortunately, a programming glitch causes numbers to sometimes be placed directly on top of bits of scenery that cannot be walked over or jumped through, forcing players to pick the wrong number to progress. There are no enemies to battle or deadly pits to jump over, but there are ladders to climb. The game stars the digitized voice of the late Jerry Nelson, who voiced and did the puppetry for the Count on the *Sesame Street* television series from 1972 to 2004.

Notable Quotable:

"Unlike *Barney's Hide & Seek*, *Barbie Super Model*, and other imbecilic kiddie titles, it is actually possible to lose . . . the programmers gave the Count a 'crouch' move which he will never, ever need to use . . . being undemanding and simple doesn't mean it's not fun . . . The Count looks like the TV puppet, and the backgrounds and obstacles are different enough for the kids to feel that they're not merely re-doing previous levels . . . There are quite a few scenarios, from Sesame Street itself to the Wild West and pre-historic times, although the most popular one with my kids was the one on the Moon . . . The color palette, however, is a little drab, relying too much on the Count's traditional greens and purples, as well as on an uninteresting shade of pale blue." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

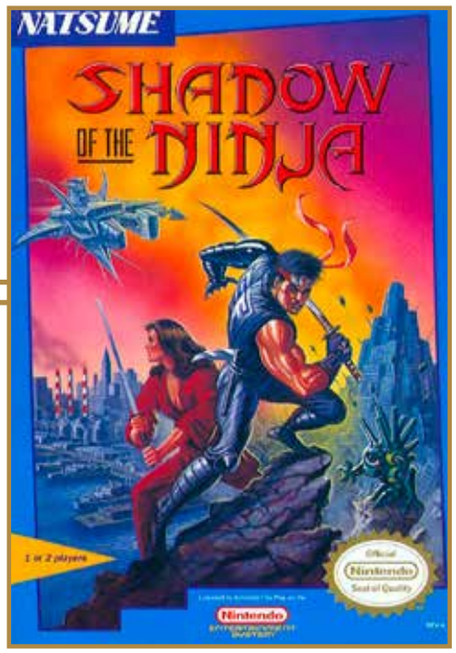
Insider Insight: Of all the *Sesame Street* titles on the NES, this one resembles a traditional game the most—taking the shape of a basic platformer. The voice synthesis is really well done and the clarity is quite impressive. The Count will go through a few phrases, telling the player if what was collected was the correct amount or not. I think this game is important, not just in the way it teaches youngsters about numbers and counting, but also how it serves as an intro to the bare basics of platforming games. Way to train up the next generation of gamers, Count! —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Shadow of the Ninja

PUBLISHER: Natsume.
DEVELOPER: Natsume.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



The mad emperor Garuda and his minions control New York City in the year 2029, and it is up to a pair of ninja warriors to save the day. After selecting Hayate (a male) or Kaede (a female), you must battle through five multistage levels—Sea Port, Underground Sewers, Rooftops of the City, Air Fortress, and Final Fortress—using a katana (your main weapon that can be powered up by finding items), shurikens, lightning bolts, energy blasts, bombs, and a sickle and chain to battle robots, soldiers, guards, ninjas, and other enemies, including such characters as Golden Samurai, Killer Tank, Water Ninja, and Boomerang Master. You will also climb, duck, dodge traps, grab poles (and swing up onto them), jump on moving platforms and over gaps, and more. The game lacks the cinematic cutscenes of such similar titles as *Ninja Gaiden* and *Wrath of the Black Manta*, but it does offer two-player simultaneous action (à la *Contra*). Not much in the way of originality going on here, but *Shadow of the Ninja* is a great, fast-action title with nice visuals and excellent gameplay.

Notable Quotable:

"*Shadow of the Ninja* is a tremendous first effort from Natsume. The graphics and play action are incredible . . . all the action you'd expect in a first-rate title. Expect big things from Natsume!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1990)

Notable Quotable:

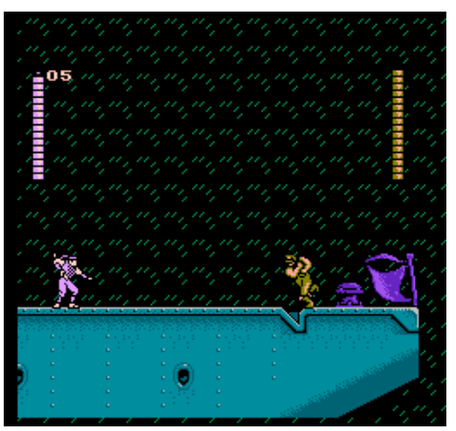
"Another ninja game with detailed graphics and *Ninja Gaiden*-like action may seem unnecessary. *Shadow of the Ninja* from Natsume, though, adds a new twist with two-player simultaneous action and great play control." —*Nintendo Power* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The levels are quite large . . . The variety in each level was quite impressive, often shifting from locales like ships, to sewers, to outside cities . . . While the stages themselves are easy enough, the bosses (especially in the later stages) become quite hard . . . I would have preferred a couple more continues or lives to make it farther through the game, but I found that the more I played the farther I got, so it definitely pushed me to play more . . . the game looks pretty . . . Unfortunately there is tons of flicker . . . The backgrounds all look fantastic and remind me of *Batman* for NES. The bosses also look quite good, with some of them taking up the whole screen. The music sounds pretty awesome, with some upbeat tunes and good sound effects." —Retro Game Man (retrogameman.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay is a mish-mash of ideas from *Mega Man* and *Ninja Gaiden*, and it's just as hard . . . Learning enemy patterns is crucial to succeeding, rather than getting into the flow and reacting to what's going on around you. The AI is aggressive, and at times you'll take damage from a projectile that rapidly appears even though the enemy is off screen; this means there's lots of trial and error that can test your patience. I found the action to be uninspiring and functional at best, and there's a severe lack of interesting level design. There's also some control quirks, as there's a slight delay between pressing the attack button a second time and your character performing it; this leads to many cheap hits due to the animation winding up again . . . a poor man's *Ninja Gaiden* without the awesome gameplay, fluid controls, and innovative focus on storytelling." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Shadowgate

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: ICOM Simulations.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Graphic Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.

A point-and-click adventure, *Shadowgate* was adapted from the 1987 Macintosh computer game. You, as the last of the Line of Kings, explore a dangerous, atmospheric, mazelike castle, trying to prevent the evil Warlock Lord from raising the Behemoth and unleashing it upon the land. The game screen is made up of several windows. The view window shows your current location as well as monsters to battle (banshees, hellhounds, wyverns, sphinxes, and the like), doors to open, and objects you can use as you move through the castle. The command window lets you manipulate objects in the view window as you select from the commands look, open, use, leave, take, close, hit, move, and speak (cast spells and converse with creatures). There's also a goods (inventory) window showing your weapons, spells, and items, such as arrow, blade, cloak, key, gem, magic sphere, sling, helmet, mirror, and torch. The results of the actions you choose as well as the storyline pop up in text at the bottom of the screen.

Notable Quotable:
"Very frustrating. It takes an age just to move the pointer anywhere! Also the interaction with the game is limited to the commands at the bottom of the screen, which makes some of the solutions to the puzzles rather obscure and a tad bizarre too, like opening a skull to find a key . . . The graphics and sound are pretty dull, too—in fact, some of the music is hopelessly out of tune! Also the amount of times the player kicks the bucket in a sudden death situation makes frustration set in almost immediately." —*Mean Machines* (August 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"*Shadowgate* has the eeriest music around, but it consists of only a few unchanging bars and a couple of different tunes. The sound effects are pure dynamite! The graphics can best be described as slides—a picture of the current room. The pictures are well-drawn, but are a little fuzzy around the edges . . . Although it isn't a live action game, the occasional use of animation is nice. What makes *Shadowgate* so interesting and different from other NES games is that everything is a secret. And if you don't figure out the secrets and riddles, you don't move. It's a game for thinkers; for teens and adults who want a real mental challenge . . . In many ways it's like chess. You can try anything in any place, but only the right move will help you advance." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: I've been playing this game for a long time and it just doesn't get old. The music perfectly complements the ambience as you traverse through the castle Shadowgate looking for items and solving puzzles. Also dying—there's usually lots of dying. There's so much that can kill you—including collapsing floors—that the classic credo of save early, save often is in full effect. Luckily, as long as you remember what you did recently, it doesn't take too long to get caught back up. I always find myself getting in the groove and suddenly the music changes to a panic inducing "your torch is about to go out" chime. Few things in video games stress me out more than that short loop playing while you struggle to light another torch. Whether it's your first outing or your fiftieth, you're sure to have a good time with this one. – Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

Insider Insight: I had never played a PC game before so I had no idea what a "point-and-click adventure game" was, so when I was introduced to *Shadowgate*, I thought the concept of pointing and clicking on things to interact with them was clever and original. My friend Troy got this game at some point during our youth and we thought that it was cryptic and hard to follow. For reasons that escape me now, one weekend we decided we were going to beat the game. We tracked down every issue of *Nintendo Power* we could and scoured through all of the "Counselor Corner" questions and "Classified Information" sections trying to come up with every nugget of information that we could on the game. With all of this information gathered we began our quest. With issues of *Nintendo Power* opened and scattered all over his basement floor Troy and I got past every riddle and every puzzle. Finally we reached the end of the game, defeated the behemoth that awaited us, and saved the day. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

Shatterhand

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Natsume.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

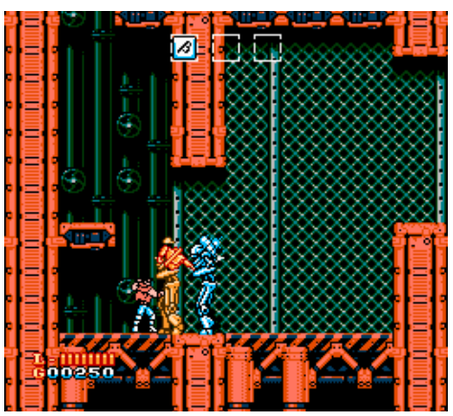
You, as futuristic police officer Shatterhand, are the world's only hope against an army of rogue cyborg soldiers. You use your cybernetic hands to punch mechanical and biomechanical enemies as you run, jump, and climb your way through seven levels: Factory, Refinery, Submarine, Filtration Plant, Anti-Gravity Research Center, Ravaged City, and Missile Command. Your fists can also block certain enemy projectiles. The beginning and ending levels must be played first and last, respectively, but you can play the five middle stages in any order. Scattered throughout are white boxes containing letters. Collecting any combination of three letters grants Shatterhand one of eight hovering satellite robots, supplementing his punches with such weaponry as grenades, laser beams, a sword, fireballs, or a large bouncing ball that retracts like a yo-yo. Other power-ups, including health, more-powerful punches, and extra lives, must be purchased with gold you collect by destroying certain enemies. Power-ups appear as platforms with a number on the front that says how much the power-up costs. Originally *Shatterhand* was released by Angel (Bandai) in Japan as a licensed game for the Famicom based on the live-action superhero series *Super Rescue Solbrain*.

Notable Quotable:
"The multi-scrolling scenery is sizzling but the music is maddening. Every inch is a fight for your life, every boss robot is murder; so be thankful that continues are limitless." —*GamePro* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The feel and control are reminiscent of *Shadow of the Ninja*, another awesome game. The graphics are well done, the control is excellent, and the music rocks!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"A great action game! With graphics and play similar to *S.C.A.T.* and *Shadow of the Ninja* and a variety of unique features, *Shatterhead* has tough action that promises to provide a challenge even for action game experts!" — *Nintendo Power* (October 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"*Shatterhand* is one of those fairly decent games that's overshadowed by its ridiculous Western box art . . . The original story was indulgent, but the localized one reads like something a child came up with after watching too many action movies and Stan Lee interviews, and has a charm all its own. The localized version even completely replaced the Carnival level with the Submarine stage, simply because that wasn't masculine enough. The bosses between this area and Area C were swapped in *Shatterhand*, with the old carnival boss being changed from female twins into a monster duo." —Jonathan Kaharl (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

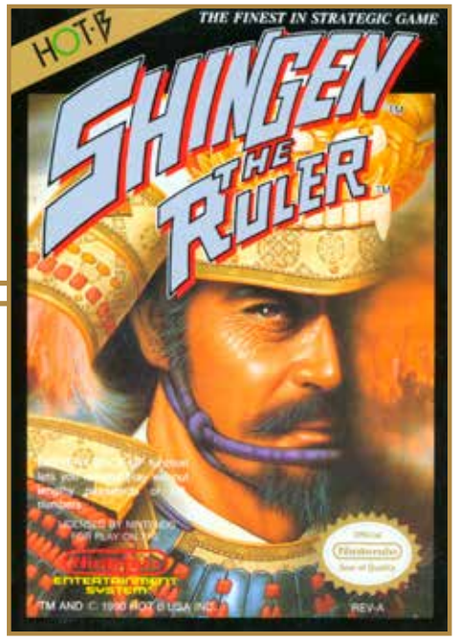


Insider Insight: *Shatterhand* is one of those games that's easy to overlook. It hit North America in December 1991. Which, for those keeping track at home, was three months after the release of the Super Nintendo. So many of those late NES releases were ignored for the newer, more powerful console releases, which is a shame, because there are some real gems out there like *Shatterhand*. I picked this up on the cheap from K-B Toys in my local mall as they were blowing out NES games. The cover was generic and absolutely early '90s in design, but the idea of running through levels punching dudes appealed to me (I'm easy). The game is so much more than just punching guys, though. I found a surprising amount of depth, with the robot sentinel that you can earn through various combinations of power-ups in each stage. And if you made the same combo of power-ups you became the robot! The game made me keep notes and I loved that. If you've never played it, give it a shot! —Dan Ryan, cohost of the *Stone Age Gamer* podcast, writer of beer, wrestling, gaming, kung-fu, and other geeky articles for geekade.com

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Shingen the Ruler

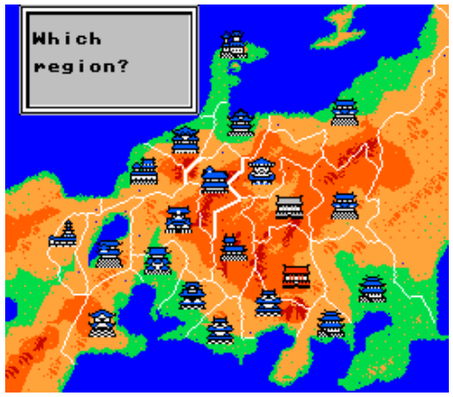
PUBLISHER: Hot-B USA.
DEVELOPER: Another.
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

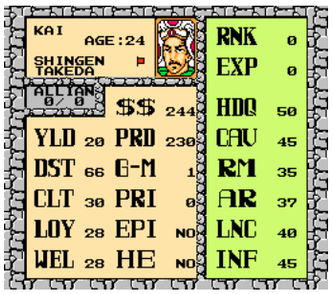


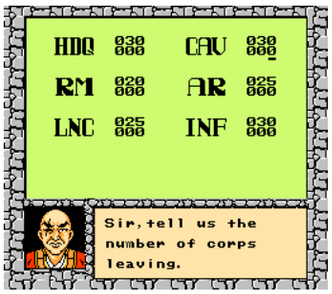
A game that would feel right at home alongside Koei's *Nobunaga's Ambition* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Shingen the Ruler* is set in feudal Japan, circa sixteenth century, the age of the samurai. As the daimyo Takeda Shingen (with his son Katsuyori), you embark on a mission to conquer all 21 territories of the country. Each territory has different stats, such as loyalty, wealth, civilization, and crop yield. Each territory has armed forces as well, including archers, cavalry, lancers, and infantry. In domestic administration mode you must build up your military, establish statecraft policy, give orders to territories, and consolidate territories. You must overcome disasters as well, including epidemics, mine cave-ins, and typhoons. Battle mode consists of field fights, the siege of enemy castles, the occupation of enemy territory, and the gaining of rank, experience, troops, and war trophies. Two types of battle are available: automatic, in which the computer takes over, and manual, in which players move troops. There are 42 different battlefields (featuring such terrain as trees, rivers, and walls) in this epic, complex strategy/war simulation.

Notable Quotable:

"Battles can be long and drawn out, depending on how you play, but I appreciate the way *Shingen* allows you to control your units; much more tactile than Koei's battles. Strategic management, on the other hand, is far less kind. Every action is performed through the convoluted menu screen. Ten obtuse abbreviations litter the left-hand side of the screen, allowing you, for example, to check your WEL (Wealth), G-M (Gold Mines), and DST (Disaster Rating), among others, in any given territory. Abbreviations in general are not difficult to learn, but some of these don't make any sense. How would one connect CLT with Castle? Worse yet are the 12 commands, which resemble chemical elements: Fa, Fc, Nj, Ok—I'm lost. Now, I'm not a stupid person. But when a game asks me to memorize 22 abbreviations from the get-go my mind wants to blank out . . . The mechanics, likewise, feel too rough around the edges, compared to Koei's typical clean interface." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



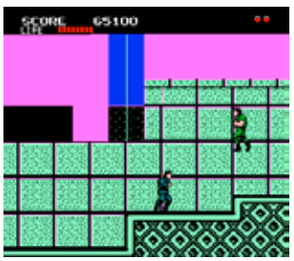




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Shinobi

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Tengen.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



A terrorist band called The Ring of Five, headed by five ninja assassins, has kidnapped the children of the world's leaders. As Master Ninja you must rescue these hostages. You are armed with shuriken (throwing stars) and you can punch and kick enemies. You'll run, jump, and battle your way through five stages, each culminating with a boss fight. Bosses include Ken Oh, Black Turtle, Mandara, Lobster, and Masked Ninja. Rescuing children gives you points, health, a pistol, throwing knives, and the ability to enter bonus rounds, which are first-person shooting galleries where you hurl throwing stars at ninjas jumping at you. Success gives you ninja magic you can use if you defeat 10 enemies right after the bonus round. There are six types of magic: metal binding (freezes enemies), invincible (makes you briefly impervious to attacks), four hands (splits you into four selves), flying squirrel (lets you fly for a brief time), lightning (summons lightning to destroy your enemies), and tornado (cloaks you in a whirlwind to mow down enemies). Inspired by Sega's 1987 arcade game, as well as the Master System port of said coin-op classic, *Shinobi* was an unlicensed release.

Notable Quotable:

"Looks vaguely like the arcade version, but the control of the main character, as well as the overall gameplay, are sorely lacking . . . still contains a high level of action, with more than enough enemy thugs, but NES *Shinobi* unfortunately comes up short play-wise . . . Not as good as the SMS version . . . Choppy graphics and animation, as well as blips and bleeps for sound effects." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1990)

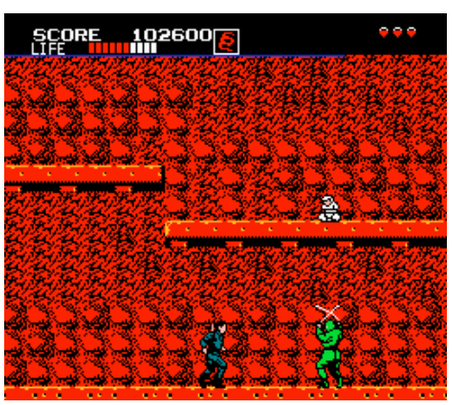
Notable Quotable:

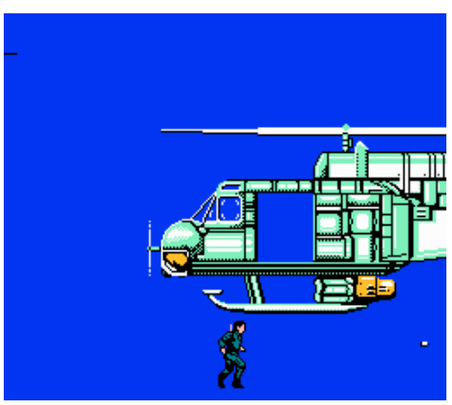
"Unlike the Master System version, the NES version does not scroll vertically at all, so the levels had to be redesigned to fit to the height of one screen; this simplifies a lot of the layouts and makes the levels feel much smaller . . . feels a little bit buggy and unfinished across the board . . . you can now use the high jump any time you want, allowing you to shoot up to the top of the screen at a moment's notice . . . the momentary invincibility after taking a hit is now gone, so sometimes you'll end up bouncing back and forth, taking unfair damage." —Retro-Sanctuary (retro-sanctuary.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Perfectly blends fast action with strategy. Compared to the original version on the Sega Master this one is faster, but not as polished . . . the up-tempo music adds a sense of urgency and the controls feel very responsive . . . great fun. The graphics are less detailed than the Master System version, with generic scenery and some minor glitches. The bosses are less imposing . . . There's lots of campy, unnecessary sound effects . . . Still, this NES version has its advantages. You can always see the areas above and below, making it a lot easier to locate hostages and drop in on foes. Enemies are more unpredictable . . . bonus stages are much easier." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

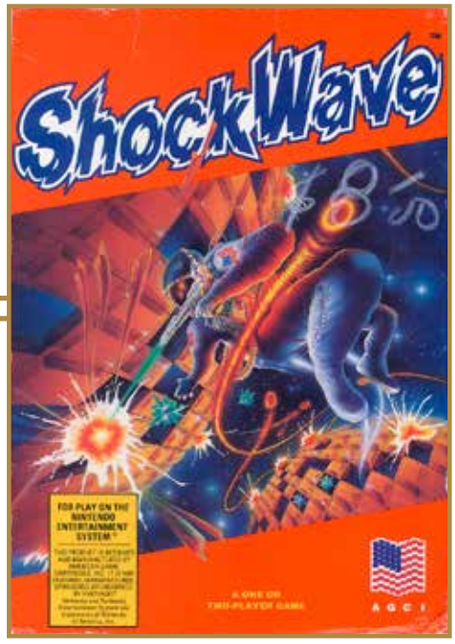
© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





ShockWave

PUBLISHER: American Game Cartridges.
DEVELOPER: American Game Cartridges.
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle/Maze, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1990.



To destroy a generator and seal an interdimensional rift in space you must collect crystal shards to power your journey through said rift. Donning a space suit, you float around a series of side-scrolling mazes using a shock wave pistol to create pathways by moving and destroying blocks that make up the maze walls. When a block is shot by a shockwave it is not affected directly. Rather, shockwaves reverberate through adjacent blocks, causing them to move or be destroyed, depending on the type of block. Shooting one block can cause as many as three others to move. Solid blocks cannot be moved or destroyed. As you go you must avoid ricocheting firestars (fireballs), which are deadly to the touch. The action is timed, so you should work quickly, but you can pick up time bonuses. Other items and playfield elements include shields (your shield can withstand three direct hits from firestars), firestar freezes, teleportation gateways (local transports within the current maze), and force fields, which restrict certain types of movement. To advance you must collect all of the crystals in that level. The game is challenging, in that you must use strategy to clear pathways around force fields and to crystals and teleportation gateways. If you get stuck from having moved blocks incorrectly you can restart the level, but that does take away a life. To make it through the 50 levels in the game you'll definitely need the supplied continues and passwords. This unusual puzzler is unlicensed and obscure, but certainly playable.

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

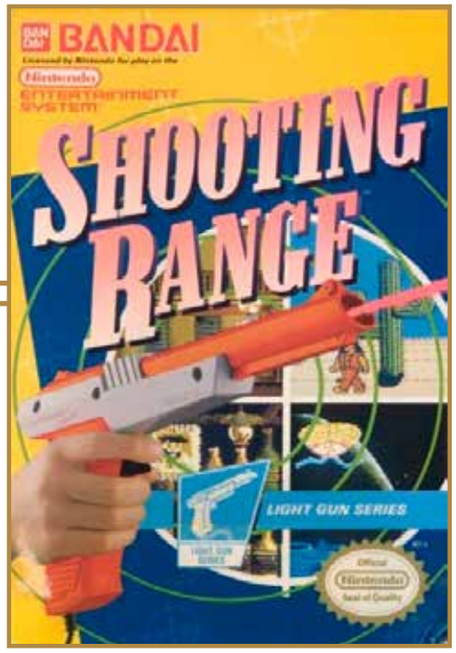
"A nice puzzle game from American Cartridges with often addicting gameplay, though not on the same level as *Tetris*." —*Video Game Bible, 1985-2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:

"Shockwave was actually included in *Maxi-15*, a 'more junk-for-your-buck' unlicensed multi-cart. But it was also released as a standalone game because money . . . difficult even within the first few levels, and you'll spend many a brain cell figuring out how to move the blocks around properly. Mess up once, à la *Lolo*, and it's time to restart the maze . . . *Shockwave* works the brain meats to reasonable standards, and all without Nintendo's approval. Good show!" —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Shooting Range

PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1–4 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1989.



Designed for use with the Nintendo Zapper light gun, this is a video version of an old-fashioned carnival game, the kind where you get a rifle and shoot targets to win your girl (or guy) a prize. The first stage is set in the Old West, wherein you shoot cowboys, Indians, and the like. The second stage is Monster Town, which is inhabited by ghosts, mummies, and vampires. Stage 3 takes place in Outer Space, complete with a strange assortment of aliens as your targets. Each stage is timed and has special items that add 50 seconds to your remaining time. The stages, which scroll a short distance with the help of the d-pad, are brief and unremarkable (in terms of layout and design), but there's certainly enough challenge with three skill levels and limited energy. In addition to the three standard rounds of play there's a tricky bonus round consisting of a wall of blink-and-you'll-miss-'em whiskey bottles to shoot. There's also a Party Mode that lets up to four players take turns firing at spinning pinwheels that pop up out of the ground.

Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay requires you to simultaneously use the Zapper as well as a controller to scroll from left-to-right; it works okay, but using two inputs is awkward and never feels comfortable. The Western stage is up first but the scenery is barren, and targets only appear across two planes, making for some unexciting action. The required point total is also never displayed, leaving you to guess when you're close to completing the area! Ghost House is more interesting due to its varying target patterns and reverse 'E' icons that introduce some strategy (accidentally hit one and you'll end up losing energy!). Space is similar to Ghost House with its tricky patterns, but when the clock reaches 100 seconds a gigantic alien boss appears that needs to be shot five times. It's a fantastic idea, and it makes you wonder why previous stages didn't follow a similar structure. The Bonus Round tasks you with shooting bottles when they start to flash; this timing based action is brilliant, playing like a much better *Mad Dog McCree* (1994, Philips CD-i), and it really shows how accurate the Zapper is. There's also a multiplayer Party mode where you blast as many targets as possible within 249 seconds; it's like *Whack-a-Mole*, but the lack of substance and stimuli makes it a real snoozer. *Shooting Range* is fun in short bursts, but it's no more advanced than *Hogan's Alley* (1985, NES) or *Wild Gunman* (1985, NES). It's definitely playable and may provide some entertainment for 10 to 20 minutes, but once you've completed it there's really no reason to return for multiple playthroughs." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Short Order/ Eggsplode!

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Action, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous), 1–5 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1989.

One of only a half-dozen games designed for use with Nintendo's Power Pad accessory, which, as you NES fans know, is a floor mat with 12 large, touch-sensitive buttons, *Short Order/Eggsplode* features two titles in one Game Pak. *Short Order* has you working in a hamburger shop, trying to please customers by building their burgers (which consist of meat, cheese, lettuce, and tomato) in the same sequence in which they were ordered. When an animal comes into the shop he will order a hamburger with three ingredients, then he will keep adding an ingredient with each successive turn. The bigger the animal, the more ingredients he will eventually want on his hamburger. For example, mice are satisfied with their order at 10 ingredients, while pigs keep going until they have ordered 99 ingredients. In two-player mode, one player assumes the role of a fox while the other plays a dog. Contestants take turns ordering hamburger ingredients until one player gets the sequence wrong three times. In *Eggsplode*, a scheming fox has sneaked into the chicken coop and is looking to raise some ruckus with the hens by planting bombs under them. The hens' nests are laid out in the same sequence (4×3) as the spaces on the Power Pad. When a fox plants a bomb under a chicken you must step on that bomb. When the game begins there is one fox with 10 bombs, but as the game wears on and gets faster it progresses up to three foxes with 60 bombs. You get extra points for stepping on a bomb just as it is about to explode, but you should be careful not to step on the hens' eggs. The lettuce, cheese, and other burger items are detailed and the foxes and chickens are cute. Unfortunately, for such bright, happy games, the music and sound effects are decidedly ordinary. Both games will give you a good physical workout.

Memories: If you like *Simon*, the handheld memory game with four color-coded buttons, you'll probably get a kick out of *Short Order*, especially if you are nimble of mind and of foot. It's a real challenge to remember the order of the hamburger items while you are hopping around getting winded in the process. To make a hamburger with as many as 99 different ingredients you'd either have to be a genius or a savant. When my kids were little, my family had an even better time playing *Eggsplode!*, which takes the whack-a-mole concept and puts it in a barnyard setting. The longer you manage to stomp out the bombs in *Eggsplode!* without accidentally stepping on an egg the faster the action becomes until foxes are whizzing right and left onto the screen, planting bombs with wild abandon. It's easy to get the lightly colored bombs confused with the eggs so watch your step. The cartridge is designed for kids, but it can be enjoyed by the entire family. These games are fun (not to mention exhausting), and can transform the living room from a passive environment into an interactive arena. I'm glad I still have my complete boxed copy of *Short Order/Eggsplode* as it brings back a lot of fond memories of when the kids still lived at home.

Notable Quotable:

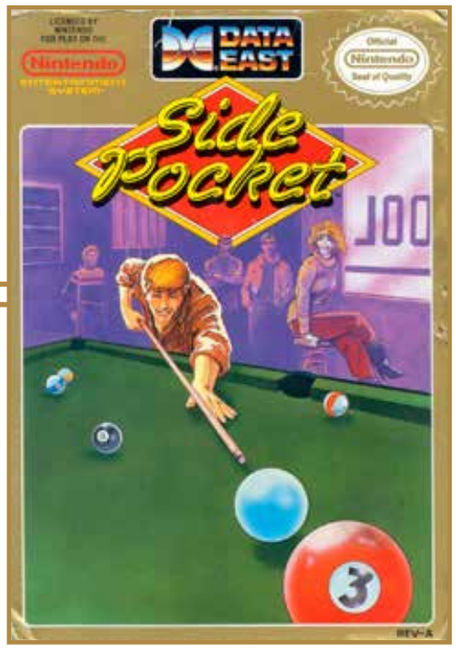
"While *Short Order* is a bit of a duffer due to its thin, boring gameplay, it's *Eggsplode!* that steals the show with its fast-paced action that's guaranteed to get a few laughs. It's the perfect mini-game for a party, and it's a good sign when you're having just as much fun watching as you are playing!" —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Insider Insight: One of my favorite things to do is show people who come over to my house games that can only be played with weird peripherals. This two-pack is one of my favorites for those occasions. Everyone who grew up with the NES remembers *World Class Track Meet* with the Power Pad, but this was the accessory's best game. *Short Order* is enjoyable enough as a goofy animal/fast food themed game of *Simon*, but *Eggsplode!* is so hectic and fun to watch people mess around with I can't believe it didn't catch on more. I've trotted this one out countless times, and every time I do, fun and laughter soon follow! —Kris Randazzo, host of the *Stone Age Gamer* Podcast, content supervisor for Geekade

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Side Pocket

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Data East.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Billiards, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.



A quality simulation of a popular pastime, *Side Pocket* offers a compelling single-player mode of billiards called Pocket, in which gamers ascend the championship ranks by achieving certain scores. For bonus points, players should sink balls in numerical order, in lighted pockets, and on consecutive shots. Trick shots with wine glass obstacles are also part of the action. There's a two-player take on Pocket pool, plus a two-player game of 9 Ball. *Side Pocket* employs a power meter and a dotted line for hitting and aiming, and players can even put spin on the ball. For those not ready for prime time a Training mode is available. The game is a port of the 1986 Data East coin-op semiclassic, which actually shows the pool player leaning over the table. Conversely, the NES game features four different rack configurations, while the arcade version has only six-ball and nine-ball racks.

Notable Quotable:
"Far and away the best billiards simulation ever published for any system . . . has everything any video game pool shark could ask for, as well as several extras you'd never dream of requesting. This is highly recommended." —*Computer Gaming World* (July 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"The comparison between this and *Lunar Pool* is inevitable, as they both address the same basic game; however, the two are quite dissimilar. While *Side Pocket* does not offer all the 'exotic' table layouts, friction, etc., it does offer a superior version of the basic game of pool. The training segment of the game is very helpful . . . The game itself is for the pool purist, as it provides the ability to use English (not available in *Lunar Pool*), as well as good shot making . . . The graphics are really excellent." —*Computer Entertainer* (December 1987)

Insider Insight: *Side Pocket* doesn't have a lot of action or flash. It's a billiards game, after all, so it really doesn't need to be anything fancy. What is here, though, is done quite well, making this my favorite billiards game on the NES. Everything feels good, from aiming, to changing the power behind your shot. I love the pleasant but jaunty tune that plays during the game and even had it set to my mobile phone's ringtone. My wife and I play this one often, as it doesn't require a whole lot of skill . . . that being said, I lose about every time we play. No matter how far ahead I get she always seems to get the girl, leaving me crying. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

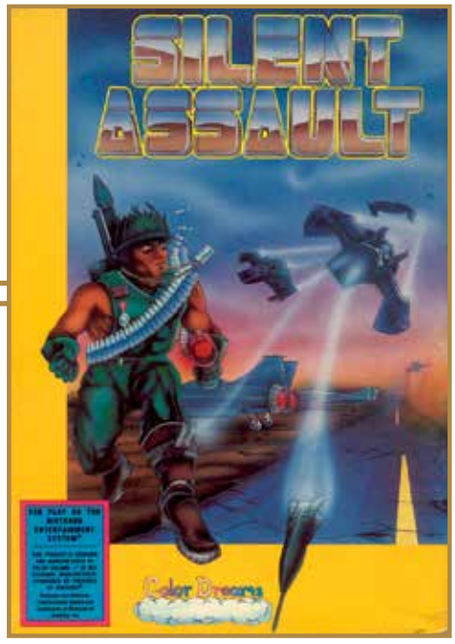
Insider Insight: *Side Pocket* made me fall in love with pool. Before playing the game I was only familiar with snooker, mostly through my paternal grandfather. Whenever we went to his house, which was usually on a Sunday, he would be watching it. For many of those years he would view it on a black-and-white TV and could still tell you what all the colors were! This obviously rubbed off on me, and I owned several games for the ZX Spectrum based on the sport, such as the excellent *Steve Davis Snooker*.

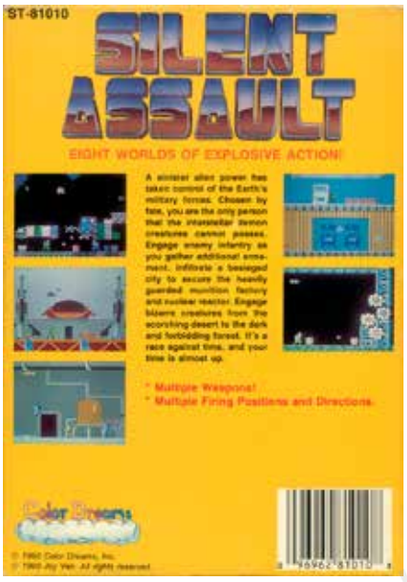
The similarity between snooker and pool drew me to *Side Pocket*. I still play the NES version on my Data East My Arcade handheld, and I have the Game Boy version via Virtual Console on my 3DS and the Genesis version via SD card on my Sega Arcade Portable. At least one of these usually travels with me when I go on holiday, and you can bet that *Side Pocket* always gets played. My love of pool that grew from playing *Side Pocket* inspired me to take up the sport more seriously as an adult, and for several years I even competed successfully in a regional pool league. Sadly, I put my pool cue down for good a few years ago, mainly due to health problems, but I can still live the dream through a game of *Side Pocket*! —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for more than 15 years

©SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Silent Assault

PUBLISHER: Color Dreams.
DEVELOPER: Joy Van.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.





Demonic aliens have taken control of Earth's military forces, and it is up to you, a Rambo-like commando, to save the day. You run from left to right, jumping over obstacles (rolling boulders, mines, torches, and the like), throwing grenades, climbing ladders, and shooting such enemies as aliens, monsters, slugs, death skulls, tanks, and flying balloons. There are several types of flying enemies but their movement patterns are similar. Standard bosses, including a skull, a mainframe computer (or arcade game, tough to tell which), and a tree trunk are similar to one another as well. Each boss is positioned stationary on the right side of the screen, emitting projectiles that are easy to dodge. The final boss is a pair of ball-throwing sphinxes. As in the vastly superior *Contra*, gamers can shoot forward, straight up, and from a crouched position, and the commando flips when he jumps. However, unlike *Contra*, you can't aim diagonally. You begin the game armed with a bazooka launcher and can acquire a shotgun (wide-angle firing power) and a machine gun (fast-repeating bullets) by bringing down enemy surveillance crafts. Shooting facility guards sometimes releases medals of bravery (for temporary invincibility) and iron hearts (for replenishing shields). There are eight areas to battle through, including a desert, a forest, a carnival, and a besieged city. Unlicensed and hard to find.

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

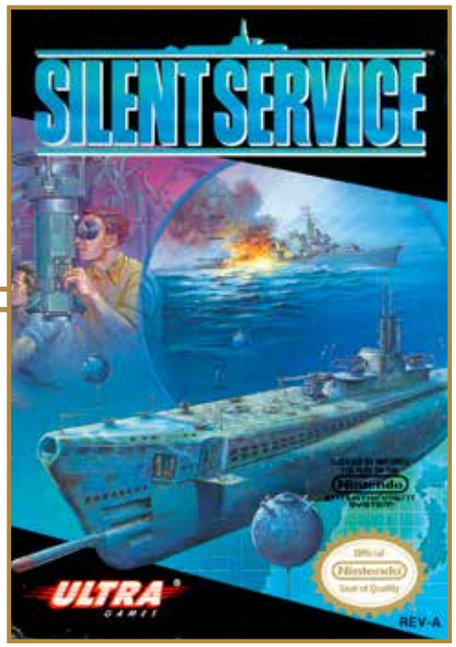
"If you love *Contra* and *Super C* as much as I do, playing this game will make you sick. To call *Silent Assault* a rip-off of those two classics would be the biggest understatement imaginable . . . The graphics . . . are horrible . . . lifeless . . . The sky is flat black with no clouds and a few white dots to represent stars. The mountains are pale blue triangular shapes with no features or other colors to distinguish them . . . some of the foreground elements like the trucks and the trees seem to exist in some kind of black nether space . . . muted colors and flat environments . . . Nothing looks even remotely realistic . . . controls are laggy . . . gameplay is a joke . . . As bad as the sound effects are, the music is even worse." —filmnstuff (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"Of all the games someone could possibly clone, why *Rush'n Attack*? The game is already considered by some to be an offshoot of *Contra* . . . *Silent Assault* borrows many elements of both games. The title is fitting, as few people know of its existence. The development feels reckless and almost untested, and the graphics, sounds, and all-around planning feel very scraped together. It's the kind of game that people will miss out on and not regret. The game's awfulness also adds to a new level of gaming: playing forward to see the awkward and often inept visions of poor game development . . . Dull levels, easy bosses, and straightforward gameplay, along with lackluster design and cheesy graphics, all add up to one terrible game." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Silent Service

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Naval Combat Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.

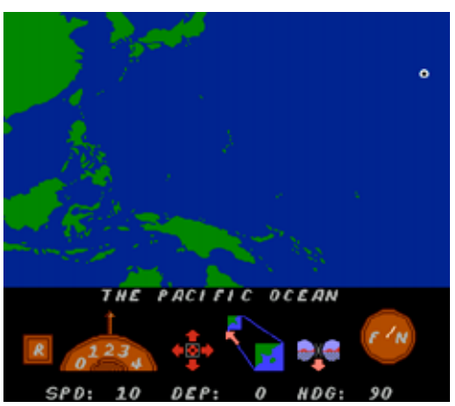


A port of Sid Meier's popular computer game from 1985, *Silent Service* is set in the South Pacific during World War II. As a submarine captain you must take on the Japanese navy and neutralize the Japanese merchant marine. This requires maneuvering a sub around a war patrol map (to locate enemy ships or home ports) and firing torpedoes at enemy ships, which you locate with a periscope. You'll monitor numerous instruments and gauges, read crew reports, hunt down convoys, avoid destroyers that are guarding enemy vessels, and much more. There are three types of missions. Torpedo/Gun Practice places you outside the American base at Midway Island, using four anchored cargo ships as gunnery practice targets. Convoy Action scenarios, such as Hammerhead at Borneo and Tautog at Night, are shorter missions involving specific historical scenarios. In the War Patrols option you command an entire patrol, setting out to sea from Midway, Brisbane, or Fremantle and continuing through a number of convoy actions. There are options galore that affect the difficulty of combat. You can customize such aspects of the game as the accuracy of torpedo runs, the damage from depth charge attacks, the skill of enemy lookouts and sonar operators, and whether or not enemy ships will change course at regular intervals.

Memories: As a game collector and reseller I've haunted many pawn shops, thrift stores, flea markets, garage sales, and used bookstores over the years, digging through common games, trying to find that diamond in the rough. I'm a regular attendee and/or guest at video game conventions as well. Even though it is a complex simulation game recommended for strategy buffs, *Silent Service* appears to be one of the most common NES games out in the wild—I still see it frequently among such ubiquitous titles as *Bases Loaded*, *NFL Football*, and *Super Mario Bros./Duck Hunt*.

Notable Quotable:

"I'm not usually a fan of this type of game—there are far too many controls and not enough things to blow up for my liking! However, practice makes perfect, and once you get into the game the action becomes quite tense as you start hunting down and destroying war ships before they get you. The multitude of difficulty options gives the game plenty of lasting appeal and maintains the challenge. I wouldn't recommend it to an arcade fan, but if you're after something a little different, *Silent Service* is well worth looking at." — *Mean Machines* (October 1990)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Silkworm

PUBLISHER: American Sammy.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

"Surrender! Worship me as your god or DIE!" So says the MHC2, an artificial brain that was designed as humankind's solution to war. This formerly helpful device has overwritten its programming and is turning our own weapons against us. To combat this formidable threat, world leaders have selected two members from "Silkworm," a top-secret defense program. This two-man team will commandeer the Silkworm attack helicopter and the Silkworm interceptor jeep to infiltrate the enemy's defenses and restore peace. The helicopter you will pilot flies in eight directions as the action auto-scrolls to the right. Your jeep, if you select that mode of travel, drives along the surface, but it can jump and back up. Both vehicles fire cannons and can shoot straight ahead and at angles. In a two-player game, controller one is used for the helicopter and controller two is used for the jeep. You can upgrade your chopper or jeep with double firepower via bonus items acquired by destroying MH Snakehead helicopters. These items can also increase your speed, score, and ranking. Throughout this game's seven levels of play helicopters, rockets, bombers, tanks, ships, turrets, land mines, and robotic vehicles will attack, block your way, and otherwise try to destroy you, so there's plenty of shooting. At the end of each level you must face a boss vehicle. Ultimately you must face the MHC2 itself. Based on *Silk Worm*, Tecmo's 1988 arcade game.

Notable Quotable:

"This game has everything from the arcades brought home faithfully to the NES. All of the straightforward shoot-'em-up action has been captured, although a bit of the detail has been washed out of the backgrounds. The game is slightly repetitive, but challenging throughout." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Though designed for two-player co-op, I actually prefer playing *Silkworm* solo because there's less chaos . . . I'll take the jeep any day of the week. Its shots are a lot more powerful . . . The jeep also has the ability to jump, giving the game a distinctive *Moon Patrol* vibe . . . one of those riveting shooters that makes you forget to blink . . . intense twitch shooting action." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

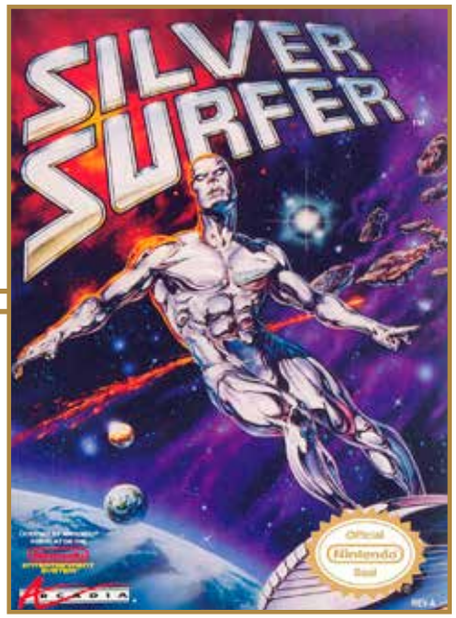
Notable Quotable:

"Silkworm is an awesome shooter that is good on its own but truly excels in multiplayer. It does not reinvent the genre but instead offers solid action and a long quest. I did not expect much but was pleasantly surprised. Forget tripe like Stinger and go for this winner." —Classic-games.net

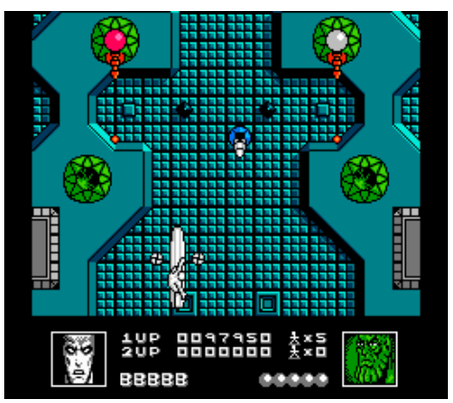
SCANNER PROTOTYPE

Silver Surfer

PUBLISHER: Arcadia Systems.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter/Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1990.



Loosely based on the adventures of Marvel Comics' superhero of the same name, who has been fighting intergalactic bad guys since 1966, *Silver Surfer* is a mindlessly enjoyable shooter with above average graphics, gameplay, and sound. Using cosmic powered bullets, smart bombs, and orbs, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's venerable creation blasts away at creatures, supervillains, gun emplacements, ships, and other enemies through two types of intermittently changing perspectives: horizontal side view and vertical bird's-eye view. Control is smooth, and the thumbs get a good workout, but it is sometimes hard to tell which objects are obstacles and what parts of the background you can fly safely over, creating moments of frustration. Oddly enough, while Silver Surfer is one of the most powerful superheroes in the Marvel Universe, in this game he can be one-hit-killed by fish, ducks, and riverbanks. In addition, the surfboard makes for a long target, many passages are narrow, and projectiles move quickly, making the action frustratingly hard (if still fairly entertaining).



Notable Quotable:
"Unusual, but interesting . . . Real precision is required to succeed . . . Cinema storyline is cool, and the music really rocks hard." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"A marksman's nightmare! The Surfer cruises on his cosmic board and kind of bowls power blasts at his enemies. You'll battle seemingly endless waves of tanks, monsters, mutants, ghosts, bats, and robots. Opponents always attack in groups, most take several hits to destroy, and none of them are slow. Robo-guns and traps are everywhere. And be careful not to crash into the scenery . . . one of the toughest shooters around, but at least the graphics are great and the sounds really cool." —*GamePro* (March 1991)

Insider Insight: If there was ever a game that caused PTSD it's this one. I dare you to last even two minutes without dying. Bullets spray in every direction in every level. After renting the game one weekend with a friend we gave up after a few minutes of frustrating play. It quickly went into the pile of, "Don't ever rent this garbage again!" I can't imagine anyone play tested this game, but if they did, I'd love to know who the gaming prodigy was that played it, because it violated me in ways you don't want to know about. How did it receive the sacred Seal of Approval? Playing with a Game Genie is the only way to go. — Chris Bores, The Irate Gamer on YouTube

Insider Insight: From the press of the NES power button *Silver Surfer* looks and sounds amazing, but don't let all of that eye and ear candy fool you—the game is hard as nails! Silver Surfer is arguably one of the most powerful superheroes ever, but this title makes him the weakest. Touching anything in any of the game's levels will result in the Silver Surfer's death. This is usually a rule of most shooters, but since this game has the Silver Surfer moving ridiculously slow, avoiding obstacles is nearly impossible. I found my personal copy of the *Silver Surfer* while traversing the empty hallways of my middle school while delivering supplies between classrooms. The game was just sitting in the middle of the floor! After quickly looking up and down the hall and failing to find a potential owner I snatched up the cart, shoved it in my oversized JNCO jeans, and was on my way. At the time I knew absolutely nothing about the game, which resulted in my excitement building up all the way to the final bell of the day. After discovering how difficult the game was I figured someone was just frustrated with it and decided to throw it away." —Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Simpsons: Bart vs. the Space Mutants

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

Bart vs. the Space Mutants was the first video game based on *The Simpsons*, the popular animated series. In this game Springfield is under attack by monsters taking over the bodies of people who live there. With his X-ray specs, Bart is the only one who can see the space mutants, so he must battle the baddies and thwart the aliens' plans of building an ultimate weapon through five levels of play. In The Streets of Springfield, Bart spray-paints purple objects red and finds other ways to get rid of them. The Springfield Shopping Mall has Bart collecting hats, some of which he must knock off people. At the Krustyland Amusement Park, Bart must find his slingshot, which he uses to shoot balloons. At The Springfield Museum of Natural History, Bart avoids laser alarms while collecting exit signs; he can use a dart gun to get signs that are otherwise out of reach. Finally, the Nuclear Power Plant finds Bart collecting nuclear power rods, taking them to the basement, and putting them back in the reactor. Bart jumps over gaps, dodges bouncing objects and falling items, fires projectiles at enemies, collects coins to purchase items, and more. The game includes many of the show's locations and characters, including bad guys Nelson, Sideshow Bob, Ms. Botz, and Dr. Marvin Monroe. On hand to help our hero are Homer, Marge, Lisa, Maggie, Krusty (extra lives), and Jebediah Springfield (invincibility).

Notable Quotable:
"While the game won't get any awards for graphics the sound is pretty good, featuring digitized phrases like 'Eat my shorts' and 'Cool man' from Bart himself. Lots of different things to do to accomplish the goal of each level. Makes you laugh and use your head." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Bart Simpson has finally made it to the NES from Acclaim. His adventure, though, is anything but a game for underachievers. This game is very challenging and could be frustratingly so to some players. The tasks that you must perform to complete the adventure require patience and skill." —*Nintendo Power* (April 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The biggest drawback of this game is its brutally difficult opening section. However, what makes it challenging are clever strategic puzzles rather than thumb bruising acrobatics. Bart tests reflexes and imagination in a way all too rarely seen in video games. Parents put off by Bart's rebellious, anti-social attitude won't find comfort here. But those who remember what it was like to be eight years old—and who enjoy Bart's animated adventures—will find that this game offers an amiable respite from the mayhem endemic to popular Nintendo titles like *Double Dragon* and *Contra*." —*Entertainment Weekly* (April 12, 1991)

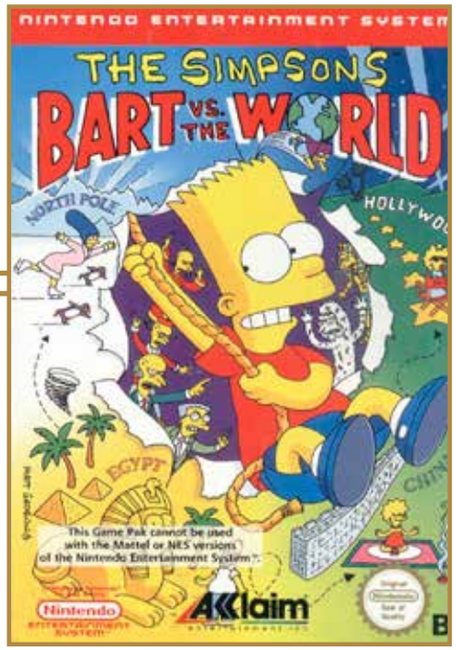
Insider Insight: I have fond memories of playing *Bart vs. the Space Mutants*, though looking at it now, I'm certain that fondness is actually for the memories of whom I was playing the game with rather than the game itself. My best friend received a copy for his birthday, and it ended up being the star of the slumber party that weekend. We weren't very good at the game, and revisiting it recently I was surprised at just how clunky the controls actually are, and how childish the overall game design seems, especially given the generally antisocial nature of Bart's notorious antics in the show.

Likewise, the titular "space mutants" were a bit of a creative disappointment, even to ten-year-old me, bearing little resemblance to the alien character designs regularly seen in the show. Still, the game does make a lot of great references to iconic *Simpsons* elements, most memorably the prank calls the player can make to Moe's Tavern from a pay phone. The Bart Simpson voice samples add polish in a genuinely great use of the license, and for me have always been the game's standout feature. To this day, every time I hear any of those iconic lines in a rerun of the show or any other context, this game is always the first thing that comes to mind, bringing back a lot of great childhood memories that ultimately overshadowed the game's shortcomings. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Simpsons: Bart vs. the World

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

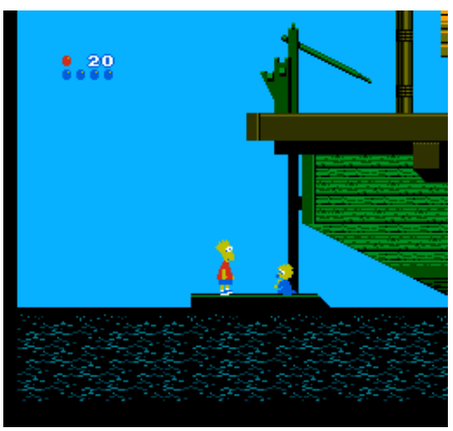


In *Bart vs. the World*, Bart Simpson has won a Krusty the Klown art contest. His prize is for him and his family to go on a treasure hunt through Egypt, China, the North Pole, and Hollywood, but the contest was actually a ploy by Montgomery Burns to get rid of the Simpsons family. You guide Bart on a perilous journey as he collects Krusty collectibles, throws firecracker balls at enemies, dodges falling stalactites and blowing snowflakes, jumps over gaps and onto platforms, floats on platforms, flies as Bartman, climbs ladders, leaps over rolling boulders, and avoids spinning sandstorms and pools of boiling water. He also rides a skateboard in one level, where he skates fast to the right while dodging enemies and jumping ramps. Level-specific enemies, such as pirates on a ship, bats in caves, and skeletons in a graveyard, populate the areas. In addition to standard baddies, Bart must battle Mr. Burns's relatives, including Fu Manchu Burns and The Abominable Snow Burns. If you find all of the Krusty treasures and Simpsons family members you get to see the full ending of the game. Simple bonus games, including Sliding Puzzle, Card Match, Simpsons Trivia, and Slot Machine, are at the end of each stage.

Notable Quotable:
"With loads of levels and a variety of sub-games, this keeps you occupied for many a merry hour." —*N-Force* (June 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"A nice multicultural touch—at one point in this travel action game Bart skateboards down China's Great Wall—puts this a notch above Acclaim's other Simpsons games, if not up to the standards of the irrepressibly subversive TV show." —*Entertainment Weekly* (January 1992)

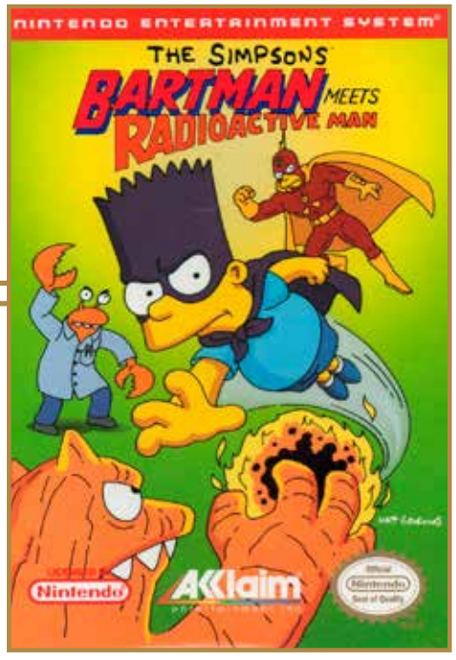
Notable Quotable:
"*Bart II*'s graphics and sounds are similar to his *Space Mutants* title. His silly swagger remains, but so do the blocky background and foreground visuals. The theme music and sound effects are okay—only the smart-aleck digitized voices are missing. Play control is identical to the *Space Mutants* title, easy to learn though sometimes inaccurate. Finally, the lack of a continue feature or a difficulty select screen makes him repetitive and probably too tough for the younger set. While Acclaim's latest Nintendo episode doesn't afford the scathing satire of the television show, it contains a lot of crowd pleasing, true-to-TV Simpsons window dressing (like the trivia contest) and solid hop-a-lot action." —*GamePro* (December 1991)

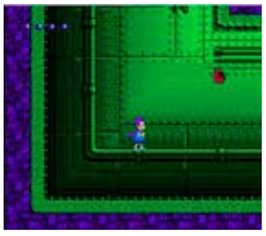


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Simpsons: Bartman Meets Radioactive Man

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.





As Bart Simpson, you don cape and cowl and transform into Bartman to rescue your hero, Radioactive Man, from the Limbo Zon. Bartman runs, jumps, swims, bounces on springs, dodges projectiles and falling objects, rides moving platforms, enters doorways, and battles enemies, including birds, fish, snakes, Swamp Hag, Lava Man, and Dr. Crab. Bartman is equipped with three Mighty Hero Maneuvers: mighty punch, spin kick, and super kick. Some moves are more effective against certain enemies than others. He can also grab pickups containing energy, extra lives, invincibility, the power of flight (where you have a double-fisted mighty blow attack), laser bolts he can shoot, and cold breath he can belch. Cold breath not only works against enemies, but also freezes swamp fungi and other substances to turn them into platforms. There are four largely nonlinear gameplay "chapters": Swamp Hag's Junkyard of Doom (junkyard, subterranean pipe, swamp, Swamp Hag's Hideaway); The Water-Logged Lair of Dr. Crabb (sea bed, crab walk, inner wall, more crab walk, boiler room, Dr. Crab's lair); 20,000 Miles Under the Earth (sunken volcano, underground city, and Lava Man's lava pit); and Brain-O The Magnificent (Limbo Zone). One area is a full-on side-scrolling shooter stage.

Notable Quotable:

"It's a colorful side-scroller with interesting terrain, but it's plagued with poor control . . . Some of Bartman's Mighty Powers are mighty slow. Punching often seems like a slow motion affair that needs plenty of forethought to begin the punch in time to connect with the target. No real life fight could be won with this lag . . . I like the look of each level, but it is so frustrating to try and get to each of them!" —8-bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

Notable Quotable:

"You might think that as the third game in the series, *The Simpsons: Bartman Meets Radioactive Man* would be good. The folks at Acclaim certainly had time to learn from past mistakes and to develop a compelling system for the final NES release in the series. Unfortunately they did neither. The game falls flat on its face in just about every way you can imagine . . . Much of the difficulty comes from Bartman's inability to move limberly. His jumps are as stiff as you'll recall from past games in the series, and his fighting skills are absolutely absurd . . . blind jumps and poor play control." —Jason Venter (www.honestgamers.com)

Insider Insight: Considering that *The Simpsons* is my favorite television show of all time, I felt obligated (in a good way) to write about one of the games based on the property for the NES. While the show has probably (definitely) gone on too long now, there's no questioning its impact on popular culture. Like any diehard *Simpsons* fan, I have my own personal list of favorite episodes of all time. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of these can be found within the show's first half dozen or so seasons. One of my favorites, season seven's "Radioactive Man," may have aired after this game was released, but I can't help but think of that episode whenever I see this cartridge. During the mid-'90s *The Simpsons* had captured the zeitgeist, and they were inescapable, video games included.

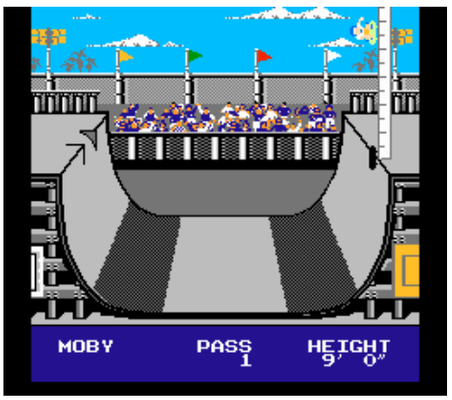
Bartman Meets Radioactive Man takes the Bartman character, Bart's super rule breaking and nonconformist alter ego, and thrusts him into a Radioactive Man comic in an effort to save his hero from the clutches of evil forces. Unfortunately the joy and humor of the TV program didn't translate into this game. The controls felt a bit off and the game in general came up lacking, despite efforts to include the show's characteristically irreverent humor along the way. Even though it tries to appeal to my inner geek, *Bartman Meets Radioactive Man* is yet another disappointment in a long line of *Simpsons* video games that came nowhere close to matching the source material's greatness. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

CARTRIDGE PUBLISHING

Skate or Die

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Skateboarding, 1–8 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.

Steeped in a decidedly '80s aesthetic, *Skate or Die* is a popular game taking place in a "rad infested world." The action in this extreme sports cartridge begins in the Flesh 'N Asphalt Skateboard Shoppe, run by Rodney Recloose, where you can register up to eight players. Then, from a map screen you guide your skater to one or all of five events. In the Downhill Race you begin at the top of the tallest hill in Boulderdash Park. It's a race of speed and timing as you jump ramps, duck through pipes, and cruise around flags. The Freestyle Competition has you doing tricks on a ramp, including kickturns, hand plants, ollies, aerials, rail slides, and rock 'n' rolls. Downhill Jam sends you through back alleys, punching and kicking obstacles and other racers. High Jump is another ramp event, but this time you mash the d-pad and B button to jump as high as possible. Joust takes place in a drained inground swimming pool; armed with a stick, you try to knock the other player off their board. Adapted from the 1987 computer game.



Notable Quotable:
"In all five events fantastic skating action combines beautifully with realistic animated graphics and lively music for a real skateboarding treat. Don't miss this one!" —*Computer Entertainer* (February 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"Not only is the variety of this cartridge impressive, but it's a good party game . . . The scenery is good, and though the detail on the skateboarders could be better, the animation is quite good . . . More rattling wheels and whistling wind and less music would have been an improvement." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games III* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Once you've got over the hurdle of the tricky control method *Skate or Die* has plenty of skateboarding laffs 'n' frolics to offer. The sprites are great, with plenty of neat touches—just watch your man get chopped to pieces when he skates into a chain link fence, for example. The events are pretty varied, and all apart from the high jump (which requires simple button bashing to succeed) are fun to play." – *Mean Machines* (October 1990)

Insider Insight: I never was much of an actual skateboarder but I loved *Skate or Die*. From downhill races, to skate ramp competitions, to whacking opponents on the head while angling through an empty swimming pool, the game had it all with regards to boards on wheels on the NES.

Curiously (and amusingly) enough, I found that I actually enjoyed the hilarious instruction manual almost as much as the game itself. *Skate or Die*, as the instructions explain, takes place in a rad-infested world where hot dogs and nachos are health foods and punk rockers with mohawk haircuts are mere "mellow dudes" compared to the in-game skate shop owner Rodney Recloose—a dead ringer for Rodney Dangerfield—and his wild son Bionic Lester. (Just who comes up with this stuff?)

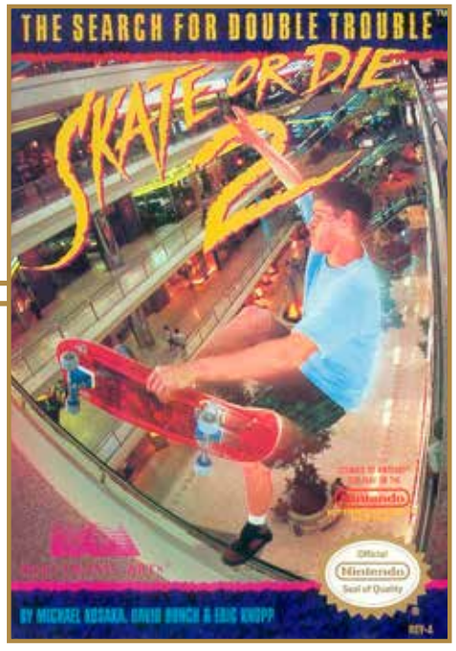
As a middle schooler I got a total kick out of it. One day in English class we had a creative writing assignment for which I penned a story that took place in the world of *Skate or Die*, complete with mellow dudes and all. Yeah, pretty ridiculous, but as an NES-loving kid that truly was where my head was. After I handed in the story my teacher, having not yet looked it over, asked me to read it aloud for the class. He politely remained silent while I did so, but immediately afterward leaned in and, with a genuinely bewildered look asked me quite loudly, "What is a mellow dude?!" with a gesturing emphasis on the words "mellow" and "dude." I can't remember exactly what I answered, but the class of course burst into laughter and "mellow dude" became a bit of a catch phrase among that group of kids for some period of time afterwards.

Who would have thought an instruction booklet would be so memorable? *Skate or Die* is one game where I feel the cartridge isn't quite complete without it. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Skate or Die 2: The Search for Double Trouble

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts.
GAME TYPE: Action/Sports/Skateboarding, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



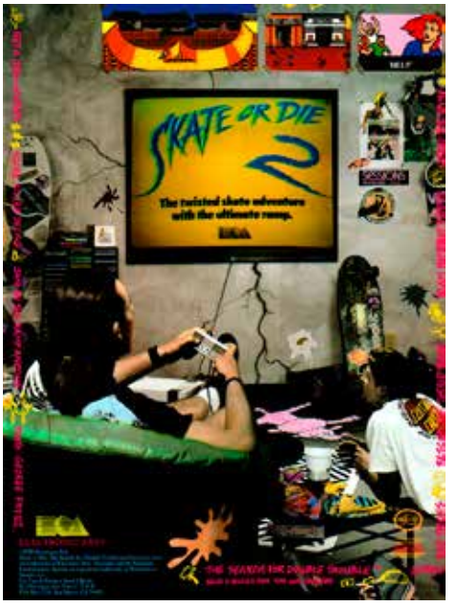
One day, while skateboarding down the sidewalk, you run over the mayor's wife's poodle, sending her into a rage. She forces her husband to declare your skate ramp illegal and tear it down. As such you must get money for a building permit and plans for a new ramp. To achieve this you'll skateboard through four side-scrolling levels: Mad Dogs in the Streets; Money in the Mall (where you'll pick up packages and make deliveries within a time limit); Blowin' Along the Boardwalk (where you pick up 16 scattered pages of your ramp plans); and Rooftop Mania. As you skateboard and pull off tricks (ollie, kickturn, brick wall stop, tail bump, skid stop, and the like) you can fire a paint gun and throw eggs and M-80s at enemies, including crabs, roller skaters, mad gulls, buff dudes, and Icepick's gang members. You'll also gather up tacos, chili fries, CDs, and cassette tapes to trade for tricks and new skateboards. After you get through all four levels you'll enter the Double Trouble Competition, where you perform tricks on half-pipe ramps that are viewed from the side. If you prefer you can simply bypass the levels and head straight for Double Trouble.

Notable Quotable:

"Over a decade before the name *Tony Hawk* first began to become synonymous with skateboarding video games Electronic Arts was innovating on the NES with the impressively diverse *Skate or Die* . . . Then *Skate or Die 2* came along and trumped its predecessor in many ways, offering a full storyline adventure in addition to the standalone skating events, as well as adding in the 'Double Trouble' half pipe, a massive structure that spanned two full game screens and let you pull off highly stylish (for the time) skating tricks." —IGN (www.ign.com), which named *Skate or Die 2* the 92nd best NES game

Notable Quotable:

"More ambitious and better looking than the original, but its gameplay has a whole new set of issues . . . the bright urban scenery is appealing. Unfortunately navigating the streets and sidewalks is a *nightmare* because they are so narrow, and touching *anything* puts you flat on your ass. It doesn't help that the controls are so stiff and unresponsive . . . Later stages challenge you to deliver packages on a boardwalk and in a mall, but sluggish controls ruin the whole experience. Fortunately *Skate or Die 2* has a ramp mode that's far more enjoyable . . . wipeout animations add to the fun . . . has some decent tunes and laughable side effects." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)



Insider Insight: *Skate or Die 2* is not the sequel I wanted. I was so excited to play this game after loving the first one. When I was a little kid I did almost no research before begging to buy a game. I saw it, immediately decided it would be great, and needed it. Not so much after this game. Disappointed isn't the right word. Confused? Puzzled? I just . . . I didn't understand. The first *Skate or Die* wasn't great, but I liked the variety, and once you got to know that game it still didn't work all that well, but you could pretend. *Skate or Die 2* ditched the event structure for a side-scrolling story mode. That is broken. And not fun at all. Even the half-pipe mode, the only redeeming feature, is just decent. I will forever be grateful for the lesson I learned from this game. —Dan Ryan, cohost of the *Stone Age Gamer* podcast, writer of beer, wrestling, gaming, kung-fu, and other geeky articles for geekade.com

(C) SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ski or Die

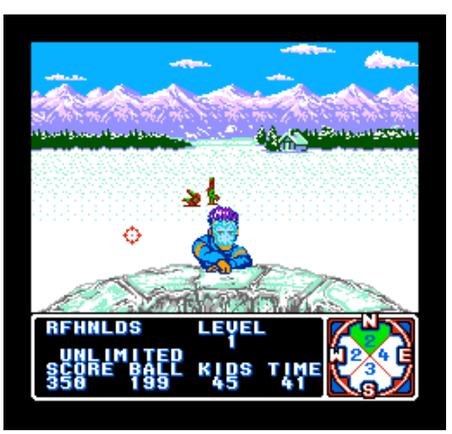
PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Skiing, 1–6 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1991.

Ski or Die is the snowy sequel to the more popular *Skate or Die*. The game consists of five wintry events. In Inner Tube Thrash you race down a mountain (viewed from overhead) and grab sharp objects (fork, lawn dart, pocket knife) to poke the opponent's inner tube; be sure to avoid mousetraps and bear traps. Snow Board Half Pipe has you cruising down a tube, performing tricks, grabbing penguins, and avoiding bunnies and logs. You'll ski fast and perform stunts after jumping in Acro Aerials and do stunts while skiing downhill in Downhill Blitz. Lastly, Snowball Blast is a first-person snowball fight; guide a cursor around the screen, hurling snowballs at brats, bears, chainsaw bunnies, bears, punk penguins, and abominable snow things while avoiding hitting ski instructors. Other enemies include "Iglooheads," which is an unfortunate term for Eskimos in the game. Rodney Recloose from *Skate or Die* runs a ski shop (hub menu world) where you can access high scores and select either Practice or Compete All mode.

Notable Quotable:
"Play control is smooth, but it will take some practice to master the downhill and ski jump." —*Nintendo Power* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"A fairly fun group game . . . All of the events except Snowball Blast are near duplicates of contests from *Skate or Die*. Some are slightly improved, like the Acro Aerials, which features more involved scoring than the High Jump. The Inner Tube Thrash, on the other hand, is less challenging than the Downhill Jam because it has fewer obstacles . . . the Snowball Blast is a lame idea that isn't nearly as gripping as the Pool Joust." —*GamePro* (January 1991)

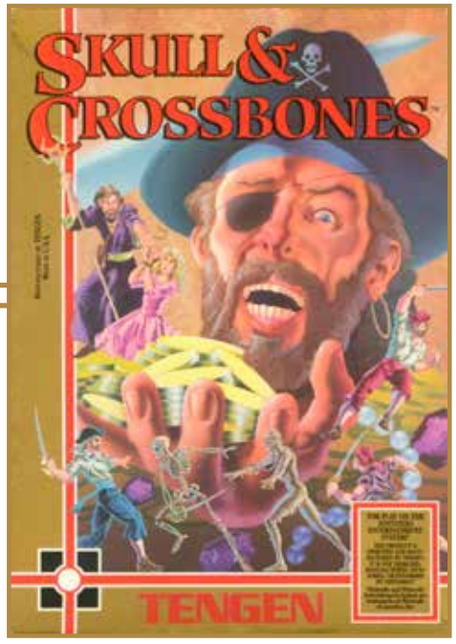
Notable Quotable:
"A succession of dull, uninteresting events . . . After a menial amount of play it's one of those titles where you have to force yourself to continue on . . . sickly color palette. Garish pinks, pea greens, and vomit purples . . . the majority of the visuals are a mass of light bluish hues and white, and lots of it . . . aside from the half pipe section primary figures are blocky and difficult to make out . . . the paths are hard to determine, and the animation across the board is jerky, lazy, and stuttered . . . .good, non-irritating snappy tunes, hit and miss SFX, and some neat soundbites of sampled speech." —Chris Weatherley (www.thepixelempire.net)

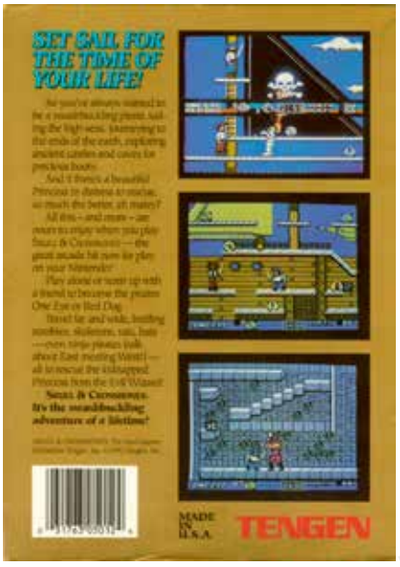


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Skull & Crossbones

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Tengen.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.





As One Eye the pirate, who can walk, jump, duck, climb, and battle bad guys, you must rescue the Princess from the Evil Wizard. As play begins you select from six levels, including three pirate ships, a castle, a ninja camp, and a beach cave. Each level ends in a boss. If you beat all six levels on the map screen you unlock the Wizard's Isle, where you'll battle the Evil Wizard and save the Princess. You can punch the various bats, pirates, zombies, archers, mace swingers, executioners, skeletons, ninjas, and other enemies you'll encounter, plus pick up icons that will arm you with selectable weapons, including swords, daggers, guns, power fists, seeker fireballs, and magic scepter shots. You can also grab health, shields, extra time, extra lives, and "booty" (for purchasing weapons). Atari's 1989 hack-and-slash arcade game of the same name placed more of an emphasis on skill-based sword fighting and a comical parrot would follow you around. The storyline is different as well. The two-player simultaneous action remains intact in the NES game, but it's now split screen. Unlicensed and fairly hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"*Skull & Crossbones* lives up to the arcade version on which it's based in almost every respect. You get jerky gameplay, poor control, a frustrating goal, and very little to be excited over . . . one of the first Tengen titles that didn't gush of superior design." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"You get a built-in level select feature that's nice, but in this instance it takes away from the game's overall challenge . . . The graphics aren't very flashy, although you'll encounter a wide assortment of enemies and items . . . basic NES entertainment. It's fun and easy to play, but it won't keep you up nights. The cart's main plus is the nonstop action, which at least gives your reflexes a workout." —*GamePro* (February 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"I *thrive* on video games with pirate themes, and *Skull & Crossbones* fits the bill nicely . . . Amusing cutscenes . . . The action is frantic . . . impressive, with large characters and bright, meticulously detailed scenery. The action is fluid, although the split screen makes things noticeably slower (hey, you can't have everything). The six diverse stages can be played in any order, and when the game is over you're rated on your performance . . . has its share of platform clichés, but it really hits the spot if you're in the mood for some swashbuckling fun." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Sky Shark

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1989.

This overhead vertical shooter has you flying over land and sea, firing bullets at airborne enemies and ground-based targets. You can also fire a limited number of bombs that destroy everything in the vicinity. A quality shooter, the game's five levels are riddled with a constant onslaught of enemies, including tanks, planes, gunboats, railway cars, bunkers, naval guns, and other hostile forces. Players must keep the P-40 Tiger Shark constantly moving and shooting to avoid annihilation. Bosses include a large tank, a large plane, and the like. If you have any bombs leftover when you reach the end of a level you get 3,000 points for each one, encouraging you to use bombs judiciously, since for every 50,000 points you get an extra life. Certain enemy planes fly in formation. If you shoot down a wave of eight red aircraft an "S" will appear. Each "S" you collect increases your firepower: four shots, four shots spread wide, five shots, six shots, seven shots, and seven shots spread wide. If you shoot down a wave of eight yellow aircraft you get 1,000 bonus points. Adapted from the 1987 Taito arcade game, which was set in World War I and featured a biplane for you to fly.

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Translated nicely . . . lots of action, and the graphics are nice and crisp. If you enjoy the genre you will want to check it out." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"*Sky Shark* has some great scrolling backgrounds and impressive enemies. There's not a lot that's new here (you get your common assortment of weapon power-ups, bombs, and bosses), but it IS a solid shooter with nice visuals. A bit repetitive in higher rounds, but as a shooter fan, I loved it!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1989)

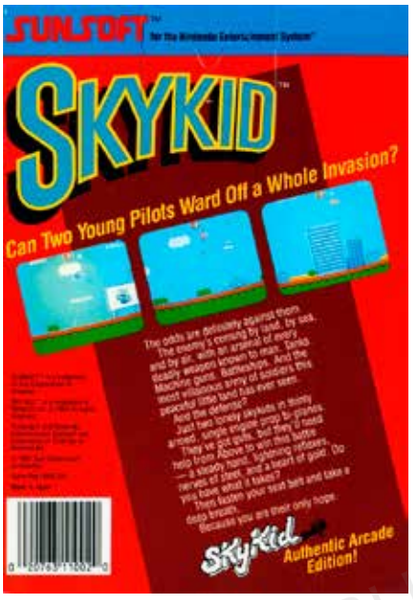
Insider Insight: I had never heard of *Sky Shark* prior to finding it beneath the tree on Christmas morning 1990. However, while *Super Mario Bros. 2* was the pick of the litter that year, *Sky Shark* had some serious staying power. *The World War II*-themed shoot-'em-up had a more serious overtone than the average NES shooter, but looking back now, a good amount of that was due to the game's wonderfully written and illustrated manual and amazing box art more akin to the painterly masterpieces of early Atari 2600 games.

I still love *Sky Shark*. It is well made, but there's likely a bit of sentimentality that biases my opinion. *Sky Shark* is one of a very select few video games that my dad ever played with me and my brothers (the only other one I can think of is *Duck Hunt*). Video games have never really been his thing, but he would actually sit down and play *Sky Shark* with us, mostly because of how much he liked seeing us enjoy a gift he had selected. I never imagined as a kid that video games would become such an emotional pillar in my life, but I'm grateful that they are, and for the connection that games like *Sky Shark* give me to my youth and happy childhood memories. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

Memories: I've enjoyed vertical shooters ever since I discovered River Raid on the Atari 2600 and Xevious in the arcades back in the early '80s. Sky Shark is one of the better 8-bit examples of this genre. Pro tip: Play the game using an NES Advantage joystick—it's more fun that way.

SkyKid

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft.
DEVELOPER: Namco.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.



In *SkyKid* you pilot a World War I biplane as it flies from right to left, shooting machine gun bullets (straight and diagonally) at tanks, trucks, boats, airplanes, and other enemies. As in *1942*, the plane can fly in a loop to veer out of harm's way (there are actually three kinds of loops), but this game has a sideview perspective rather than top-down. Each level contains a bomb you should pick up for use in destroying that level's main target, consisting of enemy headquarters, a battleship, a small row of factories, or an aircraft carrier. Taking off and landing, which you do in each level, are easy, but dodging enemy fire gets difficult pretty quickly. Fortunately, button mashing lets you try to recover from getting hit and potentially crashing. Namco's 1985 arcade original has cuter graphics and better music, but the NES cartridge does keep the basic gameplay intact, along with the playful animations. NES additions include girlfriends who blow kisses and a target practice bonus round. Some of the in-game text is missing, but this is a small gripe.

Notable Quotable:
"The best way to explain the graphics is to liken them, slightly, to the type seen in the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* movie. The action is cute, with kids in particular enjoying the loop-the-loops . . . There just isn't enough depth here for long term interest for adults." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1987)

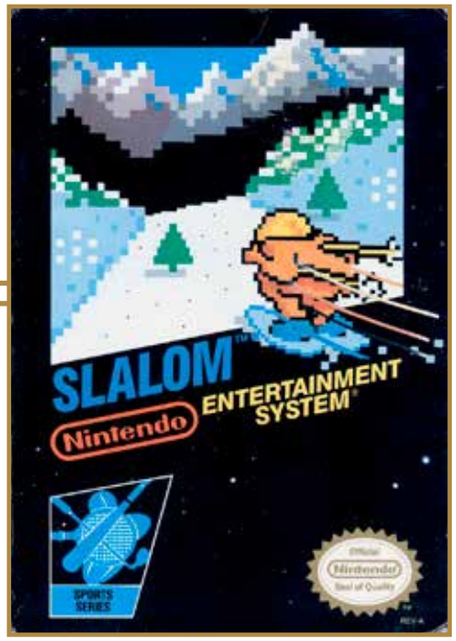
Notable Quotable:
"The game has some amusing quirks . . . in certain levels, if you perform loops near a certain background object something will happen. Looping near the sun will turn it into a moon and make the whole level dark, and looping near the Statue of Liberty will make its skirt blow up. Multiple levels also have dancing women who turn into what appear to be cats when shot . . . amusing for a few levels but will get old quick . . . isn't really that fun." —Marcel van Duyn (www.nintendolife.com)

Notable Quotable:
"*Sky Kid*'s probably never been on anyone's top 10 list, but popularity aside, it's a great game . . . One neat thing about *Sky Kid* is that when you're hit you lose control of your plane and plummet downwards, but you can pull out of the dive if you mash your buttons hard enough. This really adds to the excitement of the game, as it makes you fight to stay alive . . . a fun little arcade title that was ported fairly well to the NES . . . in the gameplay department everything remains intact." —Keith Erickson (www.digitpress.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Slalom

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Skiing, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1987.



One of just two skiing games for the NES (the other is *Ski or Die*), *Slalom* was the first console game developed by Rare. It was also the first NES title developed outside of Japan. The game eschews the distant viewpoint of most previous skiing games (such as *Skiing* for the Atari 2600 and *Skiing* for the Intellivision) in favor of a behind-the-skier perspective. You can ski down three different mountains, each containing several courses: Snowy Hill (beginner), Steep Peak (intermediate), and Mt. Nasty (expert). As you race down the slopes you should dodge the trees, drone skiers, snowmen, and sledders you'll encounter. There are flags on the courses as well. Missing these flags causes you to snowplow and slow down, while hitting them will make you tumble but not fall. You should ski around the proper side of them to continue uninterrupted. To score bonus points you can ski over moguls (bumps) to perform freestyle tricks.

Notable Quotable:
"Offers the exhilaration of sheer speed and the challenge of dodging obstacles in a blue-and-white setting of sky and snowy mountains. It's not a terribly complex game but we had a lot of fun with it." —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1987)

Notable Quotable:
"This one's fun, though the sameness of the obstacles becomes tedious after a while. If you like to shave seconds off your time you'll enjoy this. Cartoonish graphics on the skier and drone are offset by excellent perspective visuals as the flags, etc., grow larger with your approach. Snow and wind sounds would have been nifty instead of the static they've got here." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

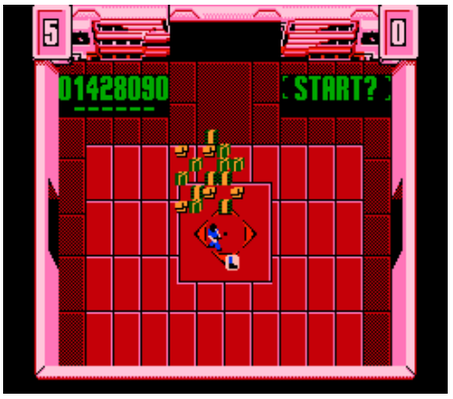
Notable Quotable:
"The gameplay is extremely difficult, even on the easiest setting, and if you fail to reach the end of the course before time runs out you'll have to restart the entire event. There's also no way to practice individual courses to build up some muscle memory. The controls are overly twitchy, so making precise movements is a problem. The time limit on some of the early courses is too strict and the CPU riders are overly aggressive to the point where you'll wish you had a *Road Rash* style punch button!" —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:
"Though the core gameplay is fun and addicting, *Slalom* is one of those NES games that will definitely take a lot of patience before you get the hang of it. Expect to throw a few fits of rage when you start failing on the earlier levels of Snowy Hill repeatedly . . . The simple gameplay of going downhill and avoiding obstacles is a lot more fun than it may sound, and the game has a fun sense of humor by peppering the stages with obstacles like snowmen and kids playing in the snow . . . surprisingly strong visuals, with the levels moving in such a way as to bring to mind SNES titles like *F-Zero* and *Super Mario Kart*." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Smash T.V.

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.

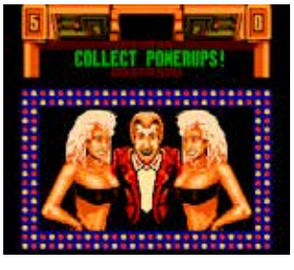


Smash T.V. for the NES is a decent port of Williams's 1990 arcade game, despite smaller characters and items and scratchy sounding gunfire and voice effects (by a slick game show host bookmarked by two bosomy babes). The game is a scathing piece of speculative science fiction in which viewers of the future demand more violence on television. Players, as game show contestants (shades of Stephen King's *The Running Man*), must run around a series of closed, overhead-view arenas, firing a nearly constant stream of machine gun bullets at cyborg mutants, power orbs, and tactical assault tanks. Item pickups include scatter guns, missiles, spew weapons, ninja blades, fast feet, extra lives, shields, cash, gold, and presents. Gameplay evokes *Robotron: 2084*, and players can use two control pads to try and emulate the arcade game's dual joystick control. This lets you move in one direction while shooting in another. Better yet, you can use two NES Advantage joysticks. Incidentally the game takes place in 1999, so I guess it's not so futuristic after all.

Notable Quotable:
"The sheer number of enemies on screen at one time is just jaw dropping, and the frenetic gameplay just keeps you coming back for more . . . the graphics and sound aren't exactly great, but who gives a toss about that when the gameplay's as good as this!" —*Computer and Video Games* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Even though there were some compromises from the arcade game, *Smash T.V.* is a game that requires great control to progress far enough into the game. As a two-player game with four controllers *Smash* is a blast. To me that is the only way to play it as it's too hard alone . . . good translation of the arcade hit. My only complaint is that the graphics have been shrunk down to microscopic size. The gameplay is almost intact." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1991)

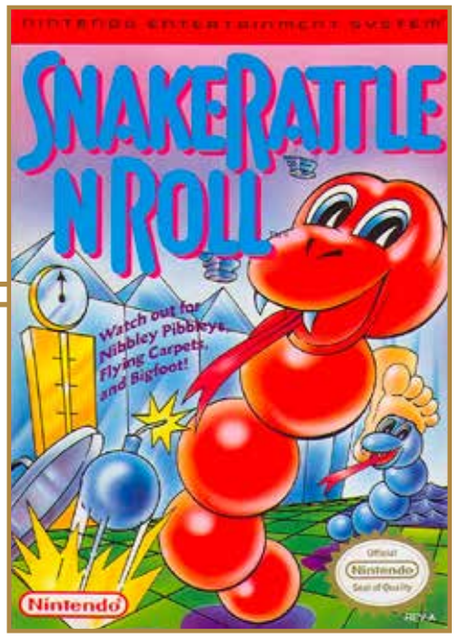
Notable Quotable:
"Pure, unadulterated, relentless, frantic action that tests your reflexes and skills to their utmost. Total concentration is required—if you take your mind off the action for a second you're instantly overrun by the hundreds of enemy droids that are all out for your blood! Because there are so many sprites on screen at once they're all rather small, which makes the game look rather unimpressive. But it's not the visuals that are important here—it's the gameplay, and *Smash T.V.* delivers in a BIG way!" —*Mean Machines* (January 1992)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Snake Rattle N Roll

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Action, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



With its crisp, clear, colorful, pseudo-3-D graphics viewed from an isometric perspective, *Snake Rattle N Roll* resembles such arcade classics as *Congo Bongo* and *Crystal Castles*. Each player controls a running, jumping, swimming, tongue-flicking snake as it goes about eating enough "Nibbley Pibbleys" (spherical beings) to activate the scale that will open the door to the next stage in 11 levels of play. All this while avoiding or attacking sharks, Big Foot, Ice Foot, snakedozers, bladez, anvilz, pin cushions (poisonous plants that shoot deadly spines), and other kooky enemies. The snake you control can hit enemies with his tongue, but jumping on them is worth more points. If the snake gets hit by an enemy it will lose a segment. When it runs out of segments it will die. Death also comes by falling too far (more than four vertical blocks), running out of time, landing on a sharp object, or getting squashed by a falling object. Fortunately there are power-ups you can grab, including tongue extensions, speed-ups, a fish tail (for swimming up the waterfall in level 6), diamonds (for invincibility), and clocks (for extra time).

Notable Quotable:

"I love this game. It looks amazing, sounds great, and is incredibly slick and wonderfully playable. If you don't get this, you're lower than a snake's belly." —*Total!!* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Full of the weird humor and brutal difficulty that are Rare's calling cards, *Snake Rattle N Roll* is an unusual isometric platformer about fattening up snakes. It kind of defies description. Just go play it—it's part of the *Rare Replay* compilation for the Xbox One." —Garrett Martin (www.pastemagazine.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphically superb, *Snake Rattle N Roll* is one of that 'rare' (ho ho) breed of games—an original title which is just so good there aren't enough superlatives to describe it. The humor is very strong indeed, and it makes a nice change to play a game which is plain fun." —*Computer and Video Games* (March 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"What a game! *Snake Rattle N Roll* is one of the most original games seen in years and simply oozes quality. The graphics are stunning, with beautifully drawn scrolling forced perspective 3D backdrops and some great sprites—the snakes themselves are utterly brilliant. But it's the playability that makes this one of the most compulsive Nintendo games around. The landscapes are fiendishly designed to test your dexterity to its limit, and on later levels you're required to take some amazingly convoluted and precarious routes to the door! But even though it's tough, the game's sheer fun keeps you glued to the Nintendo for hours on end." — *Mean Machines* (January 1991)

Insider Insight: Growing up in Belen, New Mexico, left me with few options when it came to buying video games. A Walmart had recently opened, but finding older video games was hard.

One day in 1996, while I was staying at my friend's house after school, the man next door was having a garage sale. As my friend's dad and this neighbor chatted, my friend and I rummaged through his stuff and discovered a box of NES games labeled $5 each.

We looked through the box with a sense of urgency, skipping past various games that either our babysitter or one of us already owned until I came across a game with a weird picture of a cartoon snake. *Snake Rattle N Roll* was the name of the game, and I was fascinated by that image. This was before the internet was readily available so I had no way to look it up, but I definitely wanted it based on the cover.

I didn't have any money with me, but luckily my grandpa came to pick me up shortly after I found the game. I asked him for the money and he was all for it. I guess paying $5 for an older game was a better investment in his mind than buying me a brand new title at the store.

When I got home I eagerly plugged *Snake Rattle N Roll* into my NES. Within five minutes I knew I had made the right decision. It was great fun and kept me occupied for a long time. My buddy across the street even offered to trade me for it after playing it, but I declined.

Currently the game sits in my grandparents' attic, waiting to see the light. It might be time to dig it out and brush off the dust to once again collect some "Nibbley Pibbleys." —Alex Thompson, PopNerdTV Producer

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Snake's Revenge

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Adventure/Stealth, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

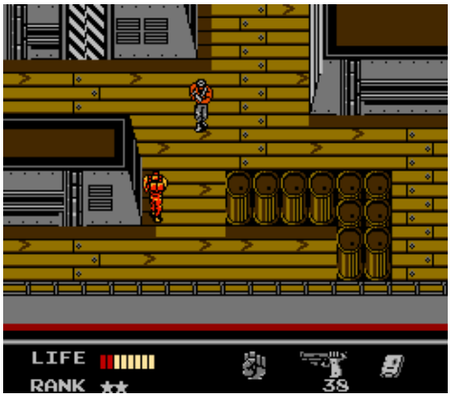
Set three years after its progenitor, *Snake's Revenge* is the North American follow-up to *Metal Gear*. Gameplay follows a similar premise, with Solid Snake sneaking through enemy territory to retrieve a weapon known as Metal Gear. To prevent detection Snake should move quietly, avoid guards, and stay away from search lights and security cameras. As in *Metal Gear* an overhead viewpoint is employed, but action heavy side-scrolling scenes have been added to the formula. In addition, there are more areas to infiltrate, including jungles, buildings, a boat, prison camps, a train, a castle, a factory, and a desert base. Snake punches bad guys and can pick up a variety of useful items, including guns, knives, mines, plastic explosives, grenades, missiles, card keys, binoculars, infrared goggles, body armor, mine detectors, smoke bombs, and truth gas. Since series creator Hideo Kojima had no involvement in creating *Snake's Revenge* many fans consider *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* to be the true sequel to *Metal Gear*.

Notable Quotable:

"Graphics have slightly improved. Textures are sharper and the perspective is more consistent. There aren't confusing areas like the tacked on jungle in the original NES game, and it seems a little easier to line up guards this time . . . Audio is much the same, with reused effects and some new music of equivalent style and quality . . . It's not official *Metal Gear* canon, but it's better than the first NES attempt . . . Plot keeps you moving but isn't very memorable. Watch out for the surprise instant death pits!" —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

"After the success the NES version of the first game had in the US Konami decided to do a sequel specifically with the western market in mind. The game was developed by a team within Konami's Famicom division, and the developers used the original MSX version of the first *Metal Gear* (instead of the NES port) as the basis for their sequel. Hideo Kojima wasn't interested in doing a sequel himself, since the original MSX version didn't sell very well in Japan. However, the lead programmer of the *Snake's Revenge* team met with Kojima at a train. The two became acquainted, and eventually the undisclosed programmer revealed the development of *Snake's Revenge* to Kojima, saying that although '(he) was a fan of the first *Metal Gear*,' he wanted Kojima to do a 'true *Snake* game' himself. When he arrived home Kojima began working on the first draft of what would become the true MSX sequel to *Metal Gear*, titled *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*." —Moby Games (www.mobygames.com)



Insider Insight: The Volume 3 Number 4 issue of *Game Player's Strategy Guide to Nintendo Games* was a big influence on my early gaming life. From it I learned about games like *Astyanax*, *Codename: Viper*, *Castlevania III*, and *Snake's Revenge*, the sequel to *Metal Gear*. I really liked *Metal Gear*, so when I saw that there was a sequel coming out I was super excited and immediately put the game on my early Christmas list.

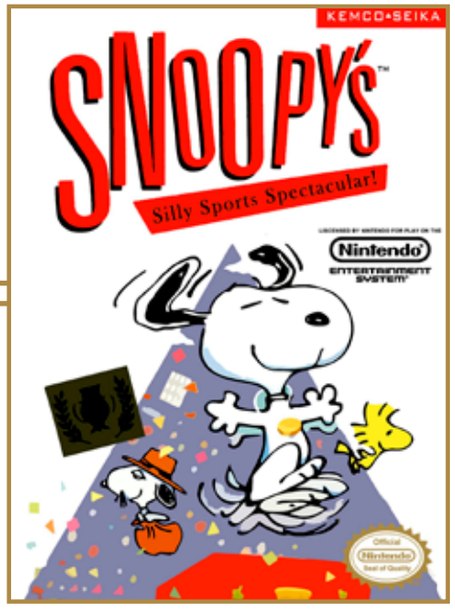
When I finally got to play the game Christmas morning I wasn't disappointed at all. *Snake's Revenge* not only looked and sounded better than *Metal Gear*, it handled better. Plus there weren't any translation issues like in the first game, since this was made specifically for North American audiences. After playing it a few times I finally made it to the part that I feel most people have the biggest issue with, the side scrolling areas. Since I had been reading about the game for months and months before playing it I was actually excited to try these areas out. At first I didn't mind these sections, but as I progressed deep into the game I thought, "Ugh, this again!" whenever they came up. However, I never let that get in the way of enjoying the rest of the game.

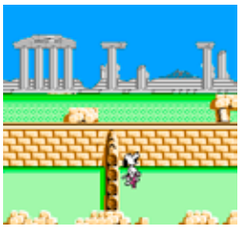
When *Snake's Revenge* was first released, we didn't know that we were supposed to automatically hate it since Hideo Kojima wasn't involved with it, and thank goodness, because that Christmas morning is one of my favorite gaming memories. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Snoopy's Silly Sports Spectacular!

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Kemco.
GAME TYPE: Action/Sports, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.





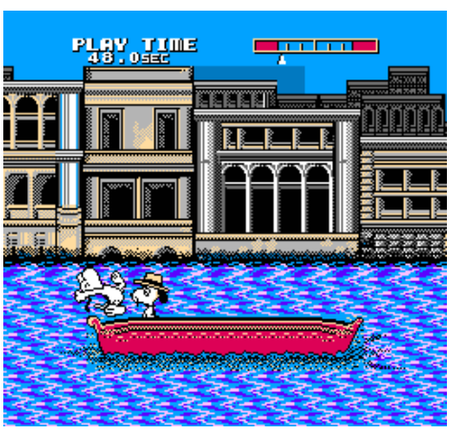
Snoopy takes on his mustachioed cousin Spike in six quick, simple, Olympic-style events: Sack Race, where you hop to the right, avoiding manholes (buildings are in the background); Boot Throwing, which is similar to discus throwing, as you wind up (by rotating the d-pad) and hurl the boot; Pile of Pizza, where you walk slowly while balancing a stack of pizzas; Pogo, in which you hop on a pogo stick, jumping over each bar; Overboard, where you push the other dog off the gondola; and River Jump, where you run up to a river, plant the pole, and vault over it. Overboard is fixed in the center of the screen (though the background moves), but the other events scroll from left to right. Timed button presses are important. The cartoonlike graphics will please Peanuts fans, as will the inclusion of Woodstock, who appears in cameos. The games are limited in nature but fairly enjoyable. The original Japanese Famicom version used Donald Duck and other Disney characters instead of the Snoopy license.

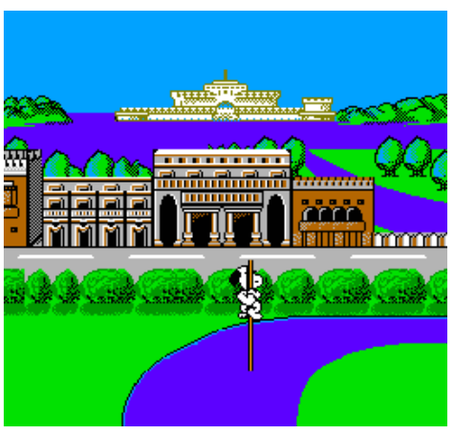
Memories: When I was a kid my mom would take me to local used bookstores. One was old school retail, with books stacked almost to the ceiling, winding mazelike through an old structure. It was an adventure every time we went, and it was a great place to buy the old Peanuts paperbacks collecting the newspaper strips. I loved those books and read them until they fell apart. The NES game doesn't really have much to do with the strip, other than the characters, but it's certainly cute and collectible.

Notable Quotable:
"Although this game is aimed at younger players, Snoopy fans of all ages are sure to enjoy the NES antics of their hero." —*Nintendo Power* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Badly executed mini-games . . . Some events are at least marginally fun, if a bit difficult to control . . . It's games like this that drive me to drink." —CGRundertow (YouTube)

Insider Insight: Although the word "sports" is in the title, I wouldn't really consider this a sports game. Some of the events here are relatively tame, like having to pogo jump over walls, but then there're some really bizarre ones like Pile of Pizza, where you race—slowly—to the finish line while carrying a stack of pizzas. You have to go slow so as to drop as few pizzas as you can. I was not good at this game as a kid, and as an adult I don't think I'll ever put in the time to get better. It's not terrible, but it doesn't have a lot to offer, either. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality





SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Snow Brothers

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.

Snow Brothers plays a lot like *Bubble Bobble* but replaces dinosaurs Bub and Bob with snowmen Nick and Tom. Players hop and run around each platform-laden screen (50 in all), throwing snow (as opposed to bubbles) at enemies with names like Chilblain, Shiver, Igloo, Frogger, Pumpkin Head, Cold Fish, and Ice-Bat. After you hit an enemy several times with snow it becomes packed into a snowball (separating the game from *Bubble Bobble*). After an enemy becomes a snowball, give it a shove and it will roll over platforms and down toward the bottom of the screen, vanishing when it hits the last wall at the bottom. The snowball crushes any enemies it rolls over. You can also stand under a snowball and press a button to bounce it up. Defeated enemies sometimes leave such power-ups as red hot sauce (speed skates), blue hot sauce (power shots), or green hot sauce (farther throwing ability). After every tenth screen you'll encounter a boss. Cute, colorful, fun, and arcade-like, *Snow Brothers* is hard to find but well worth seeking out.

Notable Quotable:

"Everything about this cart, except the music, is topnotch. The difficulty level won't make you tear your hair out, but there's more than enough fun to entertain even the most advanced gamers." —*GamePro* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:

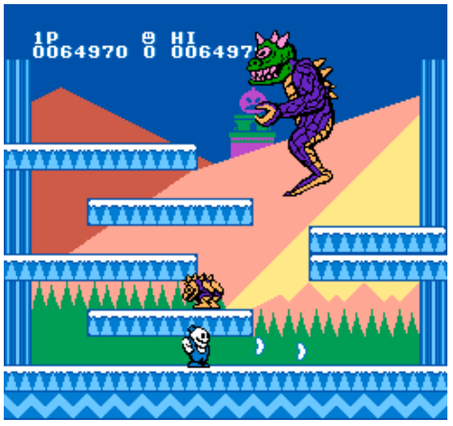
"Even though the overall idea isn't topnotch the execution is coordinated extremely well. The graphics are reminiscent of a rehashed *Mega Man* title. You'll enjoy the cheerful soundtrack despite the 8-bit sound limits." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"If you just can't get enough of that *Bubble Bobble* action/puzzle style of play check out *Snow Brothers*, or vice versa. They're both classically fun action/puzzlers that'll have even the most jaded of gamers laughing and loving every second of it!" —Shawn Sackenheim (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Bright and colorful graphics and background music . . . background color pallets change frequently, keeping the levels fresh and appealing . . . The characters themselves are cute and well-animated, adding to the game's cartoon-like atmosphere . . . addictive and entertaining." —*Video Game Collector* #7 (Winter 2007)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Soccer

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1985.

Soccer is a slow, six-on-six version of the popular sport played on a horizontally scrolling field that is viewed from an angled/overhead perspective. A number over the head indicates which soccer player you are controlling. You can dribble and pass, and when you are shooting for a goal you can aim using an onscreen arrow. You can also control your goalie to make saves and switch control to the player closest to the ball to kick it away from an opponent. This was the first soccer game for the NES and it has a sufficient array of standard features, including kickoffs, throw-ins, corner kicks, penalty kicks (there's a penalty kick session if a game ends in a tie), indirect free kicks (when the other team commits an offsides penalty), and a halftime show complete with dancing cheerleaders. You can select from five difficulty levels, three game lengths, and seven international teams: Brazil, Germany, Spain, France, England, Japan, and the United States.

Notable Quotable:

"*Soccer* has barebones options, very little depth, gameplay that's starting to show its age, and various technical issues that affect the action on the field. Although it's hardly a compliment, its only saving grace is that it's at least marginally better than the horrific *World Soccer*! (1987, Master System)." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:

"At first glance Nintendo *Soccer* doesn't look that good, with some poorly defined players and a distinct lack of scenery . . . However, it's graced with oodles of playability . . . even though the game is a little on the slow side . . . The five different skill levels combined with seven teams of varied ability give plenty of long term options, and the two-player option, as ever, is brilliant . . . one of the best simulations of the sport." —*Computer and Video Games* (December 1988)

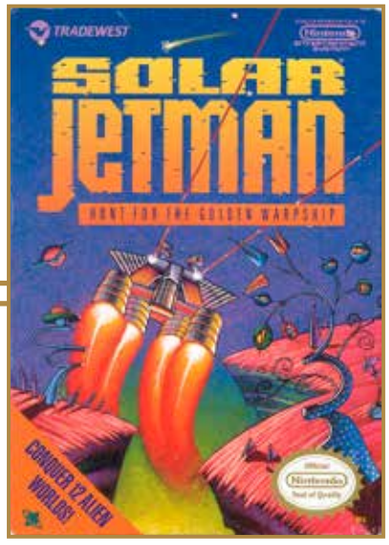
Notable Quotable:

"This is a game which, if it hadn't been for the awkwardness of the controller, would have garnered four stars. It's loads of fun and has plenty of action. This is the first game in which we found the + control pad to be too small and awkward in controlling our player . . . would have been much easier to control with a traditional joystick . . . graphics are particularly good . . . there's lots of details in the players as they race down the field, arms raised upward in a cheer when they've just scored. The crisp graphics allow you to always have a good feel of where you are on the field and what the other players are doing." —*Computer Entertainer* (June 1986)

© SCHILLER PUBLISHING

Solar Jetman: Hunt for the Golden Warpship

PUBLISHER: Tradewest.
DEVELOPER: Zippo Games/Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



In this unusual (in a good way) free roaming shooter you pilot a small, rotating, thrusting Jetpod through outer space. The goal is to gather pieces of the Tolden Warpship (along with various resources, such as fuel) and tow them to your Mothership. When you are towing an object the ship sways with the weight of that object, which is an impressive gameplay mechanic. You will shoot aliens, dodge black holes, and try to keep from colliding with planets, but the most relentless of your enemies is nature, as gravitational forces constantly tug at your ship, trying to crash it into planets, obstacles, or the path of enemy fire. Your standard weapon has unlimited firing. When you've earned enough points you can purchase such weapons as homing missiles, time bombs, and multiwarhead missiles along with other helpful items, including super shields and double-strength thrusters. You can't rush through the game. Rather, you must move methodically, which makes for a nice change of pace from most other shooters. The game looks and sounds terrific as well. When you go through a space warp just watch those stars fly by. The planetary surfaces are craggy, yet colorful, and the alien armies are creatively designed and nicely drawn. The music is tastefully understated, while the sound effects are varied and unusual. All said, it's a topnotch game that requires dexterity and patience. *Solar Jetman* is the third title in the series that began with *Jetpac* and *Lunar Jetman*, which are ZX Spectrum computer games released in 1983.

Notable Quotable:

"Each level takes ages to explore, let alone complete, but those nice chaps at Rare have provided a password option—you only need finish that first level once! *Solar Jetman* is brilliant. The mission is so vast you could be at it for weeks, but then it's so incredibly playable you won't mind doing just that!" —*Total!!* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"One of the best original entries I've seen in a long time, taking the basic premise from the rarely seen coin-op *Gravitar* and bringing it home to the NES . . . It takes a while to get used to the controls, but once gotten used to the game is very addicting . . . The massive mazes are long and challenging." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Wow! The old Spectrum *Jetman* classics were good, but for sheer playability, fun, and excitement *Solar Jetman* really stomps on them! The prospect of *Gravitar*-style gameplay with plenty of bolt-on weaponry makes for a totally fantastic game! The gravity alters for each world, and on some of the levels simply keeping control of your ship is the greatest challenge. With a depth of gameplay second to none and amazing graphics and sound *Solar Jetman* ranks as the greatest NES cartridge released this year!" —*Mean Machines* (December 1990)

Insider Insight: Rare is one of my favorite developers. Most of the games they created prior to the Microsoft buyout I enjoyed in one way or another. "Quirky" and "unique" were two adjectives I used to describe their games to my friends. It would get an eyebrow raise or two, but one thing is certain—they would always agree that they were unabashedly fun.

I purchased *Solar Jetman* back in high school because I was itching to get a new game for my NES. I had $5 in my pocket and the local Kay Bee Toys was selling it for $4.50. I had already played Rare's infamous *Battletoads* and loved it, despite its difficulty, and the game looked fun and I was willing to give it a shot. I mean, why not? It was $4.50.

What to me looked like a *Defender*-style shooter on the back of the box turned out to be something completely unique. Sure, you played as a small starship, you are in outer space, and there are enemies that need killing. What I didn't realize was that it wasn't about the killing, but the exploration, and I wasn't prepared for the gravity effects.

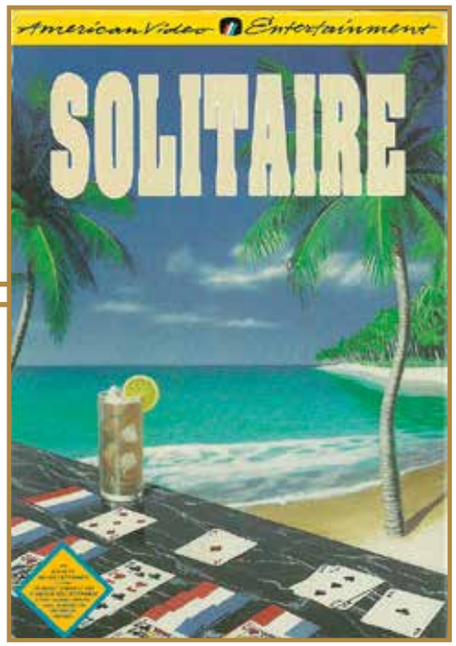
What on the surface looked like an average shmup suddenly became something more, something that required thought, planning, and strategy. To find the pieces of your ship you had to work around the gravity, which was always pulling at you. Each stage was different, with varying amounts of gravity to deal with. And it was fun trying to figure out exactly how you would snake through those tight caverns when enemies were shooting at you, gravity was yanking you to your death, and you were towing a massive piece of starship behind you.

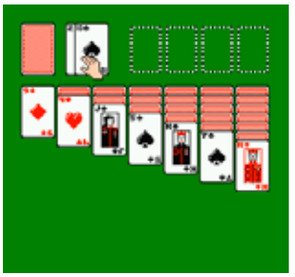
Solar Jetman was a new experience for me and I had no problem singing its praises to anyone within earshot. Why? Because it is a unique and quirky good time. — Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico, YouTuber and Filmmaker

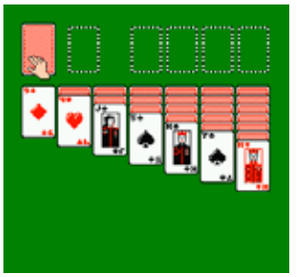
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Solitaire

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Odyssey Software.
GAME TYPE: Card Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.







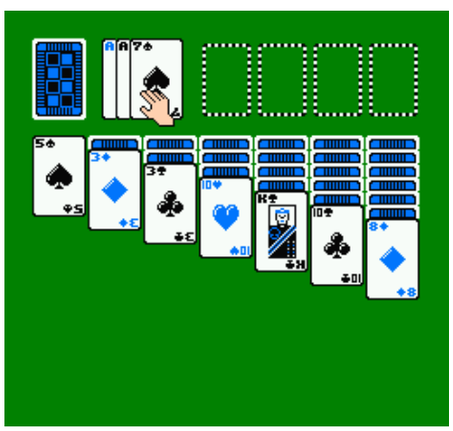
The storyline for *Solitaire* claims, "You are all alone on a beautiful tropical island beach; palm trees sway in the warm summer breeze. The songs of a thousand exotic birds fill the air." However, the solid green background and simple bleeps and bloops found in this game of Klondike (an earlier name for solitaire) would indicate otherwise (perhaps "grassy field" would have been less hyperbolic). You can select from five different card backs, five different color combinations, and whether or not to have the music and sound effects turned on or off. There are two modes of play: One Card Draw and Three Card Draw. To pick up and place cards (in descending order on the layout cards or ascending order on the foundation piles) you guide a cartoonish-looking hand around the screen. If you are victorious, "YOU WIN" will appear onscreen spelled out with lettered cards. Unlicensed and very hard to find.

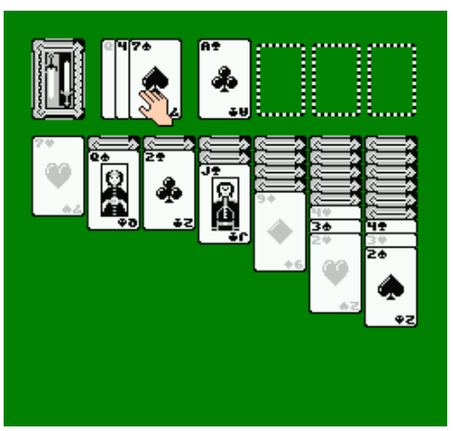
Notable Quotable:

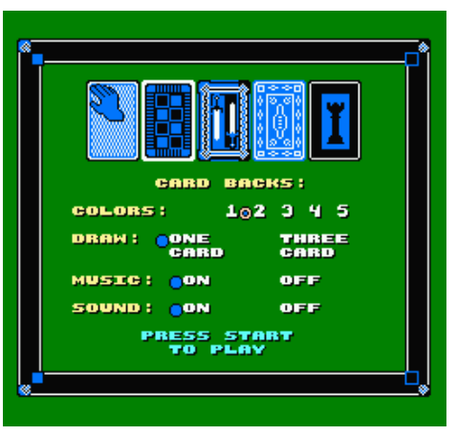
"If you are used to the version of *Solitaire* that comes free on virtually every PC in the world then you will find this version lacking. It is the same basic game but with less options and worse graphics." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Your brother or sister has played solitaire. Your parents have played solitaire. Your grandparents don't know how to use a computer and they've played solitaire. And, my friend, you have played solitaire, and probably for longer than you'd like to admit. Since computers started coming pre-installed with solitaire it has become one of the most ubiquitous games of all time, beloved by all ages for its simplicity and addictive properties. But since you can boot up a fantastic version of solitaire on your iPhone, desktop, laptop, or tablet, why fire up *Solitaire* for your NES? No reason. It's clunky, it's slow, and God help your ears if you forget to turn the music down." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



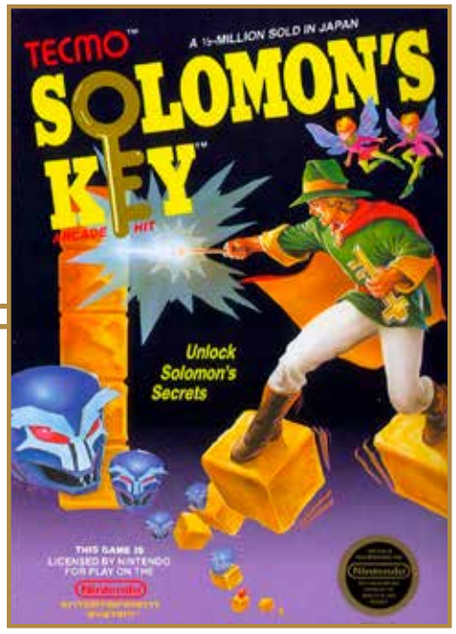




©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Solomon's Key

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Maze/Action Puzzle/Non-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.



You are Dana, a wizard who has been commissioned to rid the world of demons. Equipped with the power to generate square stones that are used as stair steps, barriers, and floating platforms, you must walk and jump your way around each of 50 different timed rooms, avoiding monsters while trying to grab a key and take it to the doorway leading to the next room. In addition to the type of blocks Dana creates, which can be destroyed, each room contains solid blocks that cannot be removed. By grabbing certain items Dana can shoot fireballs, release fairies (10 of which grant Dana an extra life), destroy all enemies at once, and more. Most of the rooms in *Solomon's Key* are deviously difficult, forcing you to think your way past the numerous obstacles and monsters impeding their progress. Compared to Tecmo's 1986 arcade original, the NES game is a little easier and gives you more time to complete each chamber. Not surprisingly the arcade has superior visuals, but this is a nice port. See also *Fire 'n Ice,* as featured in *The NES Omnibus: The Nintendo Entertainment System and Its Games, Volume 1 (A–L)*.

Notable Quotable:

"This is a difficult but ultimately fulfilling epic, beautifully made with an entrancing air of mysticism and magic." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games* (St. Martin's Press, 1988)

Notable Quotable:

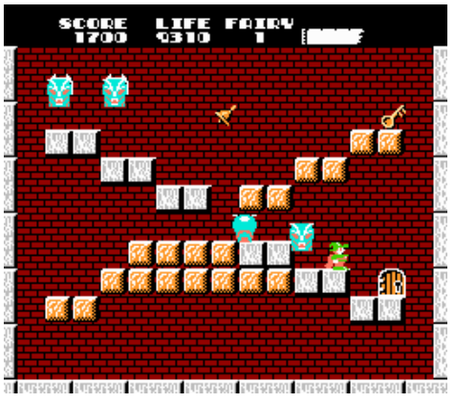
"A deceptive looking game. With its fairies, diamonds, and secret passageways it looks like another cutesy platform job. In fact, it requires considerable brain power to complete its addictive puzzles . . . it's cute, too." —*ACE (Advanced Computer Entertainment)* (September 1990)

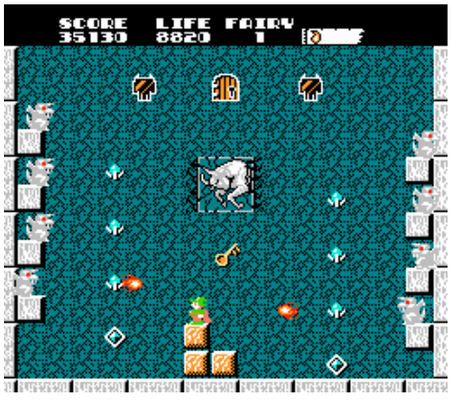
Notable Quotable:

"Filled to the brim with infuriating puzzles . . . only elite players will ever see them all . . . The European version allows you infinite continues, but oddly you need to use a joypad activated cheat code to utilize this function on the US and Famicom versions . . . a good game for popping into now and then when you feel like exercising your brain . . . too difficult for most people, but if you can put up with the frustration of constant deaths you may find something to enjoy here." —Rolan O'Lorcain (www.defunctgames.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Both strategy and action skills must be used to complete the game and solve its many mysteries. The one thing that always really struck me about *Solomon's Key* is the attention to detail, especially in the gameplay department. There are so many items and secrets, and even when you complete the game, you want to visit these chambers again to find that little thing you missed the first time . . . although the game is really hard (no continues nor save options), chambers are 'easy' to beat once you know what to do (all chambers can be solved without using a single fireball!). The more risk you take the more secrets you unveil, and this is what makes the game so brilliant." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

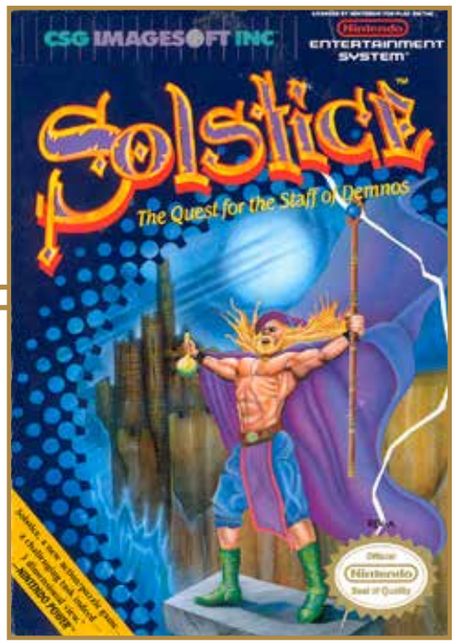




©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Solstice: The Quest for the Staff of Demnos

PUBLISHER: CSG Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle/Adventure/Isometric Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



As Shadax the wizard, you must search the more than 250 rooms of Kastlerock fortress, searching for the six pieces of the magical Staff of Demnos. Your overall objective is to rescue Princess Eleanor from Morbius the Malevolent, an evil mage. Many rooms contain blocks that can be walked on like steps and used as protection against pyramid spikes. Many areas contain enemies, such as skulls, eyeballs, trolls, and slime balls. To maneuver through the rooms, which reset upon re-entering, Shadax jumps on platforms and picks up and places the blocks to reach otherwise inaccessible areas. He can even place blocks in midair. A magic map lets you track where Shadax has been (rooms only appear on the map after Shadax has visited them) and some rooms contain secret exits that appear on the map but don't appear on the game screen until you have performed certain tasks. There are four keys Shadax must find to complete the quest. These make blocks appear in previously empty rooms or make a door appear in a solid wall. Shadax will also make use of bombs to open holes in walls, portals to reach certain rooms, coins as save points, magic boots to jump higher, and four different magic potions: blue (invincibility), purple (destroys all moving objects), yellow (stops time, freezes all moving objects), and green (makes invisible objects appear).

Notable Quotable:

"*Solstice* is beautifully drawn and thought out, with multiple levels to explore, hidden rooms and staircases, and much more. The effort is made very difficult due to the awkward diagonal controls, but if you're persistent you overcome them . . . a refreshing change from all of the me too type puzzle games . . . The maze is large and the package should prove addictive." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"I've always been a big fan of isometric 3D games and am pleased to see this style of game on a console. *Solstice* is very much in the classic *Knightlore* mold, and transporting items from one location to another and avoiding traps and baddies is what it's all about. Swift reflexes are required in many situations, and you've also got to get your old gray matter into gear if you are to solve all the puzzles—some of them are very devious! —*Mean Machines* (June 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are excellent throughout, with some of the best backdrops and sprites ever seen in this type of game. I've gotten through about 30% of the game, and for each area the graphics just keep on improving! The sound is excellent as well. The renowned Tim Follin comes up yet again with some brilliant atmospheric scores—probably some of the best music yet heard on the NES. The gameplay is excellent, with some brain-bending puzzles and nice power-ups for Shadax's abilities . . . a very original and compelling game that'll have you super-glued to your console." —*Computer and Video Games* (July 1991)

Insider Insight: Back in the day I blindly rented *Solstice* from my local video store with little knowledge of what it was. I saw ads for it in various gaming publications of the time, but no reviews or screenshots other than what was on the back of the box at the store. I also knew nothing about the publisher (Konami and Sunsoft were the only ones who mattered to me).

When I booted up the game for the first time, the quiet and unassuming music that greeted me was a little underwhelming . . . until the bass kicked in and exploded out of my small television speaker like a bat out of hell! That music instantly captivated me and got me excited to play the game. I allowed the entire track to run its course and loop back to the beginning so I could not only listen to it but watch the attract mode play out and get a feel for what was in store.

Once I began to play the game it surprised me in every conceivable way. The isometric view took a little getting used to and some of the platforming was a bit tricky, but nothing that couldn't be mastered with a little patience. And in the end the game was fun and rewarding, taking you on a challenging trek through some cool environments in search of useful items to help you on your quest.

Solstice was one of my favorite games back when it was released, and remains one to this day. Most of all, it stands as a reminder of the days when the video store was our Xbox Live or Nintendo E-Shop, the days when renting a game was a gamble with your money. When you'd take a chance on one game with the expectation that it would be garbage like the 10 you had rented before it, but instead found a favorite that would stay with you for the rest of your life. — Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico, YouTuber and Filmmaker

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Space Shuttle Project

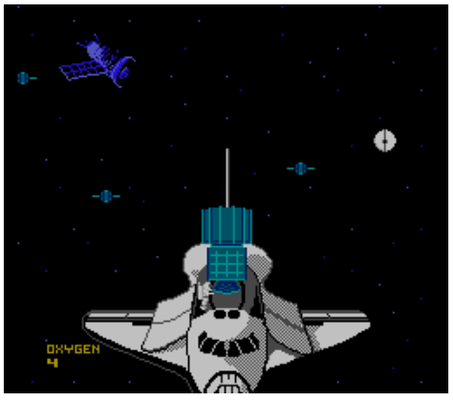
PUBLISHER: Absolute Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering.
GAME TYPE: Flight Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

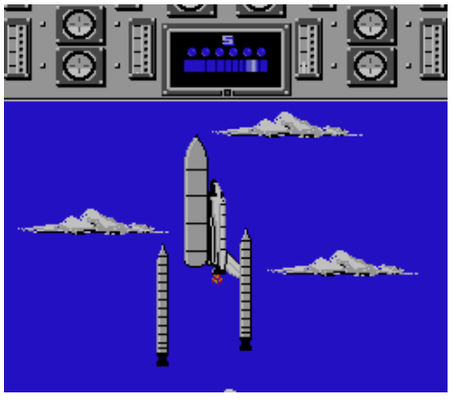
Congratulations! You got such high marks on your training performance that you have been promoted to Shuttle Commander. Your job is to lead a series of Alpha Priority missions that are vital to the welfare of the United States, US-Soviet relations, and the growth of the space program itself. After a mandatory security check your mission begins. In stage 1, you must activate the space shuttle's oxygen and hydrogen pumps, open the orbiter hatch, and escort your crew into the orbiter. The second stage is the liftoff. Here you must ensure your craft's ability to break gravitational pull and enter orbit. In stage 3 you must launch a satellite, begin the initial phase of space station construction, retrieve and relaunch the satellite, begin the second phase of space station construction, rescue the Soviet Cosmonaut, and complete space station construction. The final stage deals with reentry. Here you must close the cargo bay doors, turn the orbiter around, de-orbit burn to slow down, pitch the orbiter nose up, fall into the Earth's atmosphere, perform an S-turn, approach the runway, deploy the landing gear, land the craft, and apply the brakes. To complete some of the missions you must first familiarize yourself with the Shuttle Guidance System in the instruction manual. *Space Shuttle Project* was designed by former Activision employees (David "Pitfall!" Crane even lent his voice to the project), making it an unofficial sequel of sorts to *Space Shuttle: A Journey Into Space* for the Atari 2600, but it is more obscure than that game.

©SCMEDIA PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Strongest points are the graphics and sound effects. Digitized speech is used effectively in several parts of the game and, believe it or not, you can actually understand every word! The graphics are crystal clear and realistic. When the ship lifts off the entire screen shakes. With the exception of the final mission, most players will make short work of the game. Once you get the hang of it and learn what's expected of you it gets easy fast . . . great fun . . . manipulating the gauges makes it feel like you're really there." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)





Insider Insight: As a child my dream was to become an astronaut. *Space Shuttle Project* was a title for kids who held that dream. I only rented it a few times, but what was there was fun. The only problem was that there wasn't much there. It was split into a series of mini-games, most of which had a tight time limit. It was my first experience with Quick Time Events (QTEs for short), where you had a very limited time to push a certain button or two or die instantly. The first few mini-games involved getting into space. Then you had a couple revolving around the mission and, finally, landing.

The mini-games repeated (especially the launch and landing ones), getting more difficult the longer you played. I had fun living out my fantasy as an astronaut but quickly got bored with the game itself. I went back to it as an adult and had the same experience. Fun at first, bored after an hour or so. Obviously there is much more to being an astronaut than what this game offered, but it did include a valuable lesson: sometimes the things we think we want aren't actually what we want after we acquire them. Eventually my hopes of going into space had to move aside due to my poor eyesight. The US Air Force is the entryway to becoming an astronaut and they required 20/20 vision if you wished to pilot a plane. As such, my interests shifted from space exploration to other forms of technology. —Chris Leathco, blogger at Retro Gaming Roundup, author of *Afterglow* and *The Virtual Boy Game Library*

Spelunker

PUBLISHER: Broderbund Software.
DEVELOPER: IREM.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.

Based on the 1983 MicroGraphicImage computer game, *Spelunker* has players exploring caves deep beneath the Earth, shooting a phantom blaster at ghosts (which can fly through walls) and firing a flare gun to scare away bats (these are the only two enemy types in the game). Finding keys to unlock doors to various passages is crucial (red keys open red doors, blue keys open blue doors), as is using dynamite to blow away rocks blocking your path. There are ropes and ladders to climb, rocks and pits to jump over, coins and sacks of money to collect, and elevators, boats, and mine cars to ride. You can find energy to replenish the power of your blaster and character. Jumping can be tricky and falling a short distance can result in death, making for a difficult but immersive game. IREM released an arcade version in 1985.

Notable Quotable:

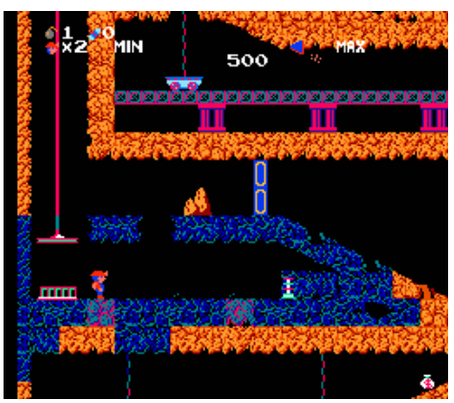
"*Spelunker* was a delightful game of exploration when introduced in 1983, and it's every bit as much fun now in this new version for the Nintendo system." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"At four levels it's a rather insubstantial game. Once you can overcome its difficulties, it's possible to beat it in around 15 minutes. That makes it more akin to a 'snack' game rather than any sort of engrossing experience. If you're in the mood for that and feel like a challenge, then yes, I do recommend *Spelunker*." —Game Complaint Department (gamecomplaintdepartment.com)

Notable Quotable:

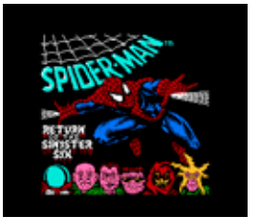
"Things get off to a terrible start as you can only fall a couple of inches without dying, and the controls are extremely unresponsive when jumping off a rope. The trick is to quickly press forward, release, tap A to jump, then release again; this eliminates 99% of the problems, but it's a quirk that should have been fixed prior to the game being published. With this out of the way you can enjoy the gameplay and explore the huge, beautifully designed cave . . . each area is intricately designed to test you. Surviving to reach the next checkpoint is addictive, and I particularly like the mine cart section where you try to dodge falling debris. . . . It's chock full of ideas and the gameplay has an impressive level of depth that's way ahead of its time." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Spider-Man: Return of the Sinister Six

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: B.I.T.S. Studios.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



Return of the Sinister Six is the only Spider-Man game for the NES. Unfortunately it's mediocre at best, thanks to poor collision detection, lousy controls, and hackneyed level design. Players control the web-slinging hero as he dodges obstacles and punches, kicks (including jump kicks), and shoots webbing at such enemies as crooks and robots. There are supervillains to tangle with as well, including Electro, Sandman, Mysterio, Vulture, Hobgoblin, and Doctor Octopus. Each major baddie is a boss and has his own stage. Spidey can also jump, crouch, turn somersaults, climb, enter doors, and pick up and use the following items: a key (for opening a locked door); a TNT detonator (for blowing open a secret passage); and infrared goggles (for seeing in the dark). Webbing is key for reaching certain areas. Web fluid is limited, but you can find more throughout the game. The action, which is loosely based on *Amazing Spider-Man* #s 334–339, takes place in the following New York City locations: The Power Station, Toxic Waste Dump, The House of Illusion, Streets and Rooftops, The Forest & Hobgoblin's Cave, and Doc Ock's Castle.

Memories: I've been a huge Spider-Man fan since I discovered my cousin's comic book collection sometime in the early 1970s. Shortly thereafter I began watching *The Electric Company*, strictly for the "Spidey Super Stories" segments. I was a heavy reader of the comics during the 1980s, and I also enjoyed the Atari 2600 climbing game and the excellent *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends* cartoon. It's a shame *Return of the Sinister Six* was the only Spidey cartridge on the NES, as it doesn't do justice to Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's legendary creation.

Notable Quotable:
"A game which truly defines the phrase 'not bad.' However, it's not great either, and is basically recommended to diehard Spideymaniacs only" —*Nintendo Magazine System* (1992)

Notable Quotable:
"A well-crafted, entertaining action cart worth taking for a swing. Responsive controls, an impressive variety of moves, and detailed graphics allow you to experience superheroin' firsthand." —*GamePro* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"There were some games that pulled a lot out of the NES in those last couple of years, but I feel like this wasn't one of them. Perhaps I was expecting too much, but although some of the colors are bold and the backgrounds solid, characters blend into the stages in a lot of areas and everything is a little cartoony—in a bad way. The presentation does have some scenes between each stage that resemble nice comic art, but my favorite thing might be the cover art on the cart. The soundtrack, on the other hand, is pretty good, producing a catchy loop, but seriously lacks in diverse tunes . . . Traversing the levels isn't too bad . . . The designs of these areas seem fine at first, but it is quite easy to get lost in a few of them . . . I love how the enemies here look like they are exploding in large chunks of clay when they are defeated. I just wish the combat was better . . . As someone who grew up a Nintendo kid I'm sad Spider-Man didn't have a better outing on the 8-bit console." —Stephen Wilds (culturedvultures.com)

Insider Insight: In 2012, my roommate and good friend decided to move away with his girlfriend, so I decided it was time for me to make a change, too. My job allowed me to work from home, so I made the tough decision to move back to my small hometown with my parents to help save some money. It wasn't easy for me to adapt back to life in a tiny, isolated town away from all my friends, and one of the things that helped me cope was trying to complete retro games. One of my earliest conquests I decided upon was *Spider-Man: Return of the Sinister Six*, because not only is Spider-Man my favorite superhero, but it was also a game I saw ads for in comics and magazines but never got to play as none of our local rental stores ever got it.

Return of the Sinister Six is not a good game and it doesn't do right by its title character, though I do give it credit for how well it handles one of my favorite supervillains, Mysterio, who you have to fight three times, as the first two versions are robotic duplicates in classic Mysterio fashion. I'll always overlook the game's countless flaws as it helped keep my mind off of the new living situation I found myself in. I played through the game's six levels over and over while simultaneously studying YouTube tutorial videos until I finally beat Doc Ock. —Blair Farrell, owner and content generator for Comic Gamers Assemble, author of *The Web of Spider-Man Games: The Amazing and the (Not So) Spectacular*

QUARTERSHOT

Spiritual Warfare

PUBLISHER: Wisdom Tree.
DEVELOPER: Wisdom Tree.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

A game that borrows liberally from *The Legend of Zelda*—but of course comes up far short of that classic—*Spiritual Warfare* is nevertheless of fairly high quality for a religious game. While traveling through a park, a prison, the woods, and other areas of town, players must throw "fruits of the spirit" to convert unsaved souls (i.e., defeat enemies). Defeating a boss—most bosses have puzzle elements, such as using certain weapons on them—reveals a piece of the "armor of God." These include belt of truth (for pushing obstacles), boots of the gospel (for walking across rubble and wet cement), helmet of salvation (protection from explosions), breastplate of righteousness (cuts damage taken by half), shield of faith (cuts damage taken by an additional half), or sword of the spirit (the sword bursts when it is thrown). Other useful items you can acquire include Samson's jawbone (for beating certain bosses); keys (for opening locked doors); and torches (to see special blocks in puzzle rooms). Periodically an angel will present players with Bible trivia questions and Christian Helpers are on hand to offer advice. Unlicensed and hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

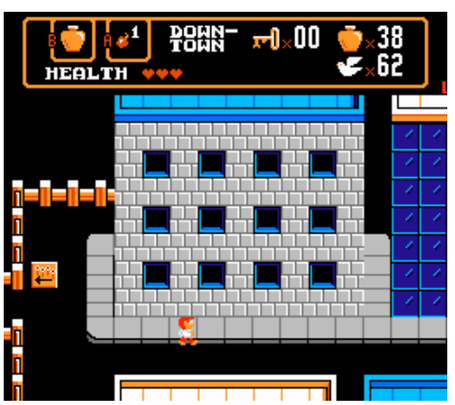
"Graphics and gameplay are adequate, but the biggest flaw is the music: there's only one song loop. Still it's a strong game, and arguably the best religious one on the NES." —Karen Niemla (*Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the NES Library*)

Notable Quotable:

"The most hardcore rip-off of *Zelda* that I've ever seen . . . pathetic Christian overtones. When you kill enemies they drop to their knees and begin praying, like you're forcing them to repent for their sins. Yeah, that's really good. Teach kids if someone doesn't believe the way you do then they deserve to die . . . I will admit, though, this guy's got some moves . . . This game is actually pretty fun . . . The controls are actually fluid and intuitive. There's no glitching or unfair game breaking enemies . . . What do you expect when you copy one of the greatest games of all time?" —The Retro Demon (YouTube)

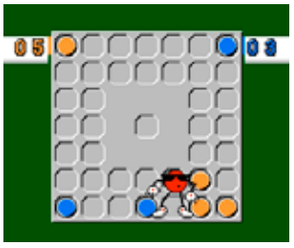
Insider Insight: The Bible games on the NES are infamous for their poor gameplay mechanics and weirdness. *Spiritual Warfare* is definitely a weird Bible game, but it is one of my favorite NES games of any genre. The gameplay is similar to *The Legend of Zelda*, and that is what captured my attention when I first experienced the game at FuncoLand back in the day. The thought of a Bible game playing like one of the greatest games on the NES enticed me. The main mission of the game is to obtain all pieces of the armor of God and take down the Devil himself, and it is executed very well. Out of all the Bible games this one has to be the most polished and entertaining. It isn't at all boring and it doesn't force-feed you Bible excerpts or trivia. It's action packed and has many exploration elements, making it a solid must own for your NES collection. —"8- Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality

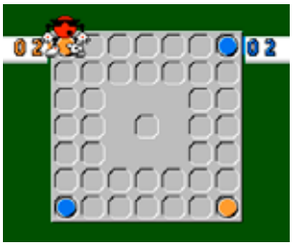
© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Spot: The Video Game!

PUBLISHER: Arcadia Systems.
DEVELOPER: Arcadia Systems.
GAME TYPE: Board Game, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.





Spot has players moving round pieces on a customizable 7×7 board, trying to change all the pieces on the board to their color. Moving a piece to an adjacent empty space duplicates the piece by one. Moving a piece to an empty space that is bordered by any opponents' pieces turns those pieces to the moving player's color. Players can also skip their piece over one or two spaces, but the space the piece started in will become empty. When a piece is moved Spot, the red, round, shades-wearing 7UP mascot performs one of 35 different animations, such as dancing, diving, moonwalking, or rollerblading. Landing on the Secret Spot unlocks a spinning reel mini-game in which players can win a free turn, extra time, a free move to any square, or the ability to swap a piece with another player. An Edit mode lets players change the layout of the board, thus changing the game's strategies. Based on *Infection*, the European computer game.

Notable Quotable:

"A simple concept with cute graphics and stimulating gameplay. It offers fast play, multi-player interaction, a long shelf life, and much delight." —*Computer Gaming World* (December 1990)

Notable Quotable:

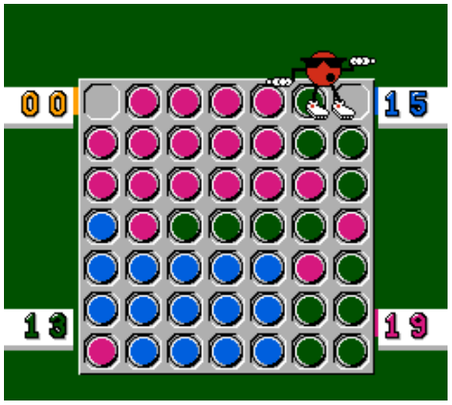
"*Spot* looks like *Othello* at first but plays a game all its own. Original methods of changing your opponent's chips to your color are what really makes this game shine, along with the dozen-plus animations of the comical spots moving on the board . . . Spot is a cool and hip character . . . Michael Jackson should move this well!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"*Spot* is a ton of fun, and like *Tetris*, provides an intellectual challenge. Fans of *Othello* will be especially delighted with the twists, given the familiar theme. The one minor quibble: the computer could be a tad more diverse in its opening moves . . . the Spots are superbly animated . . . the different musical themes are cute at first, then quickly become redundant . . . looks and acts like a real game board." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games 4* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"I preferred having four players on the board—myself and three computer players. This increased the unpredictability of this game and made things much more interesting. I had the odd game here and there where all three computer players decided to gang up on me and eliminate me early on in the match . . . graphics were pretty good . . . The animations were also well done. My only nitpick of this game was that no matter who won, the boards that displayed the letters always had a blue background . . . Every animation had its own jingle, so there wasn't very much in terms of dead sound . . . a fun little diversion to play . . . it'll get tiring after an hour or so." — Drew Wilson (www.freezenet.ca)

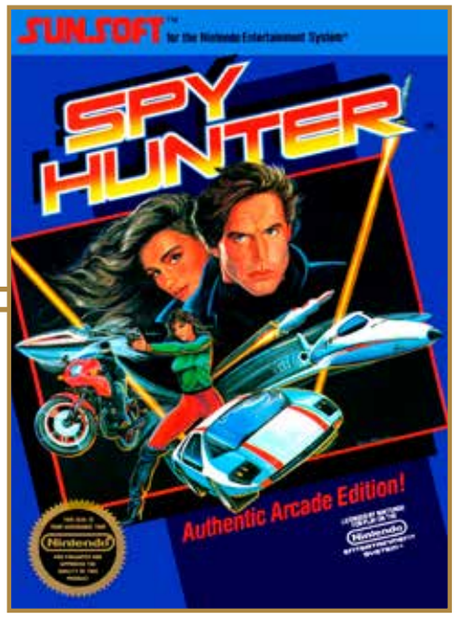


Insider Insight: Only during the 1980s could you get away with having a soda pop mascot star in their own video game. This could've been something special but it was a complete letdown. They should've just called it "Spot Checkers" or "Spot Othello" because that's essentially all it was; an over-glorified board game with cutscenes. I would have been really upset to have spent $30.00 on this title back then just because I begged mom for "the 7UP game." I honestly can't think of a game that could've been slapped together quicker than this one. I'd rather just bust out a regular game of checkers or *Othello* than play this title. Why?? Just WHY?? —Chris Bores, The Irate Gamer on YouTube

OSCILLOSCOPE PUBLISHING

Spy Hunter

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft.
DEVELOPER: Sunsoft.
GAME TYPE: Demolition/Combat Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.



Spy Hunter puts you at the wheel of a specially equipped Ferrari, driving up country roads (environments include trees, snow roads, beaches, and the like) while firing a machine gun at limousines, helicopters, motorcycles, and other enemies, some of which fire back. You can also avoid the enemies or bump them off the road, and care should be taken not to destroy pedestrian vehicles. The action is viewed from overhead and scrolls vertically. When a weapons van appears you should enter it to obtain oil slicks, smoke screens, and missiles. Occasionally a boathouse will appear where you switch out your sports car for a boat. The shooting action in the rivers is similar to the streets but no weapons van appears, and enemies include such watercrafts as speedboats and cruise boats. Like Bally/Midway's original coin-op classic from 1983, the game features the "Peter Gunn" theme song. However, the NES version moves along at a faster pace, causing some frustration, and it is missing the "Beware of the enemy agents" points screen.

Memories: I always stunk at *Spy Hunter*. No matter how many times I practiced in the arcades or on the NES I just wasn't very good. Same with *Defender* and *Defender II* (a.k.a. *Stargate*). It's not that I can't handle hardcore arcade titles—I can kill it at *Asteroids Deluxe* and *Scramble*, and I'm pretty decent at *Robotron: 2084*—but for whatever reason I just lack the skill set for *Spy Hunter*. Maybe it's just too fast.

Notable Quotable:

"Incredible speed . . . it certainly made it tough to stay on the road and avoid the enemy . . . The graphics are crisp and colorful . . . The sound effects are extremely good . . . This adaptation is a fine one and will enhance any action lover's library. We've always liked this game, and this version did not disappoint!" —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"In 1983, there was nothing cooler than sitting in the cockpit of *Spy Hunter* at your local arcade to cruise the streets with the 'Peter Gunn' theme blaring in your ears. Nevertheless, it was still pretty cool when the NES finally made it possible to hunt spies in the comfort of your own home. As expected, *Spy Hunter* still stood out as one of the NES's greatest driving games, even though it had aged a bit." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Spy Hunter* the 73rd best NES game

Insider Insight: I didn't own *Spy Hunter* when I was a kid but several of my friends did, and I played it frequently at my buddy Jared's house. We were too young (age 9 or 10) to recognize the game's illustrious history and theme music—the arcade version was by then long past its peak, and for all I knew Peter Gunn was what you'd call Peter Pan if he snuck a Colt .45 into the fight with Captain Hook. But we loved the game's on-your-toes mix of fast driving and taking out (or avoiding) enemy vehicles, and locating the boathouse was always the coolest part of the action.

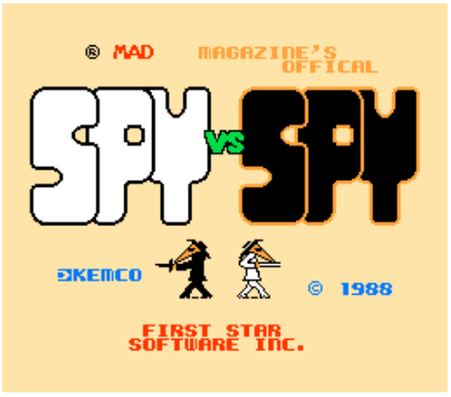
I never managed to win the game as there is no actual end—*Spy Hunter* continues indefinitely until you've crashed your last car into a Game Over. But that wasn't widely known until the internet era, and I sure remember plenty of kids back then claiming to have beaten it—elementary school braggadocio at its finest!

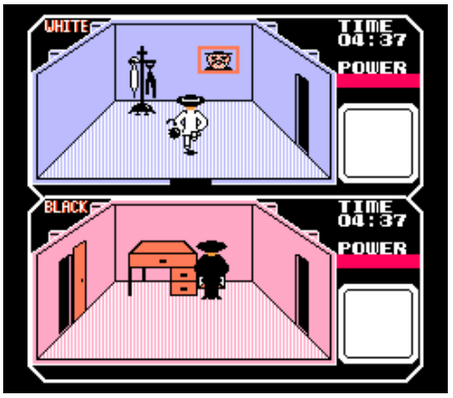
The endless course layout does lend to superb replay value, as there is always the continuous opportunity to better your score. Resultingly, *Spy Hunter* holds up especially well among NES games decades later, and having finally purchased it as an adult, I still enjoy playing it to this day. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Spy vs Spy

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Kemco.
GAME TYPE: Action, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.





Spy vs Spy pits the pointy nosed Heckel (white spy) against his virtual twin Jackel (black spy) as they traverse a maze of sideview rooms, setting booby traps (dynamite, giant springs, water buckets, and time bombs) for one another while searching for a passport, a bag of money, a key, secret papers, and the exit. To find the items you must interact with furniture, pictures on the walls, doors, coat racks, and the like. Booby traps can backfire, so be careful not to get caught in your own trap. To disable the traps the spies can collect water buckets, wire cutters, and umbrellas. A split screen layout allows for two-player action, and a mapping system helps you keep track of both spies and the locations of the items and traps. Hand-to-hand combat ensues when both spies enter one room. There are eight selectable levels of play. The higher the level, the more rooms in the embassy, and a second floor is added as you get deeper into the game. Based on the 1984 computer game, which in turn was based on the *MAD* magazine comic strip.

Notable Quotable:

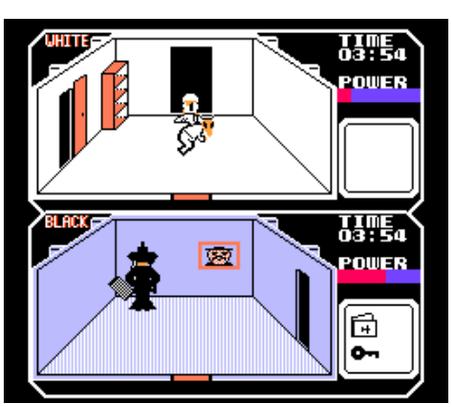
"There never was much color in any of the versions and the NES version isn't going to change anything. All the little effects, like the sniggering spies, are faithful to the original . . . Annoying tune plays throughout the game. Despite the poor graphics and sound there is something about this game that makes it extremely playable." —*Raze* (February 1991)

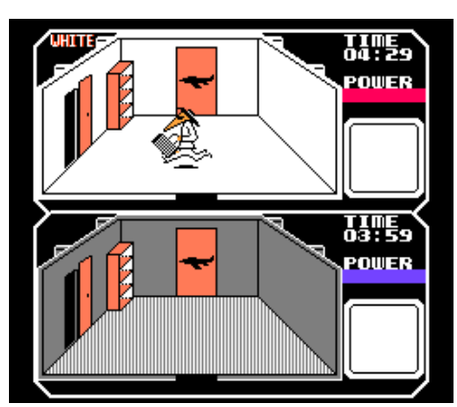
Notable Quotable:

"One of the finest two-player games I've ever seen . . . There's nothing more satisfying than letting your opponent think he's about to escape with all the goodies when in fact you've secretly booby-trapped the door to freedom a few minutes earlier. Watch him frazzle as he opens the door and then grab the goodies yourself and make a getaway . . . might not have the best graphics and sound in the world, but if you have another gamer at hand willing to play you this is a must." —*Mean Machines* (November 1990)

Insider Insight: Being a huge fan of *MAD* magazine, I rented this game when it was hot off the press. I was excited they made a game featuring these quirky spy characters. When I got it home, however, I was greatly underwhelmed at what the developers tried to pass off as a game. What were they thinking? Were they drunk?! The graphics were terrible, the music was awful, the color pallet gave me vertigo, and I think I stomached maybe 10 minutes before I turned it off. *Spy vs Spy* probably would have been better served as a side scrolling platformer, but instead we received this pathetic attempt at a branded game. This could've been such a cool concept! Arrgg!! —Chris Bores, The Irate Gamer on YouTube

Insider Insight: This game is all about setting traps for your opponent to unwittingly encounter. The map isn't huge so there's only so many rooms to work with. The key here is to try to watch the other person's progress and make note of where the traps are so you don't open a chest of drawers and get your face blown off and whatever else that can happen to you. It can be hard to keep track of where you've been and where you've placed your own traps, though, as a lot of the rooms look really similar. I had fun playing this with my sister in small spurts as a child, despite being absolutely terrible at it. Though not much has changed, and I'm still terrible at the game, its quirky charm is worthy of notoriety. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality





SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Sqoon

PUBLISHER: Irem.
DEVELOPER: Home Data.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.

Aliens from Neptune crave "man ham," so they have melted Earth's polar ice caps, sinking all its cities underwater. To save the day, players must pilot a submarine (from left to right) through eight areas (New York, Hawaii, China, India, Egypt, Greece, England, and the North Pole), shooting at crabs, sharks, sea horses, robots, mines, and other Neptunian threats. Your sub is equipped with two weapons: an upgradable missile launcher that shoots straight ahead and ice bombs that fire diagonally downward. Enemies don't shoot back but they swarm and zigzag all around, and making contact with a vessel, creature, or other enemy is lethal. To earn points, refuel (which you must do frequently), gain speed, and power-up the missiles (including spread fire) players should rescue humans—who are freed by shooting domes and factories along the ocean floor—and deliver them to the surface. *Sqoon* should appeal to old school shooter fans but it is hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"We found the game cute, but not likely to keep our interest over the long term. It's a straightforward action game of shooting and rescuing without much subtlety or a great amount of depth. It's fun to play in small doses but lacks lasting appeal." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"The sunken cities you see at the beginning of each phase are pretty much the only background graphics you'll get. But in exchange for a very monotone seascape you'll be pleased by the overall look of in-game animations. The game is littered with tiny sprites, but unlike very early NES games, all of these sprites are charmingly in constant motion . . . stages are quite long and repetitive . . . delivers good horizontal action, fluid and quick-paced . . . solid gameplay." —Hardcore Gaming 101 (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Notable Quotable:

"The game starts harmless enough—it is technically very solid, the sub is fairly easy to control, the action is fast, the enemies are generic but get the job done, and rescuing humans has its share of fun. And then you suddenly run out of fuel and crash to your untimely death . . . collecting nine humans is a perfectly acceptable condition, but dropping a bomb on some crab so it releases gold? Refueling quickly becomes a tedious chore and will likely be responsible for most of your deaths . . . the level design is truly uninspired . . . enemy attacks are completely random. There are a few interesting secrets here and there but the game just didn't gel for me." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

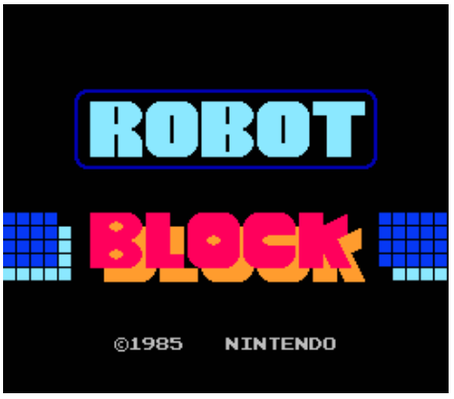
Insider Insight: *Sqoon* is such a unique little freak of a game that I was a little off-put the first time I ever played it years ago in college. The story in the game's manual reads like an Ed Wood movie script. You play as a reluctant anti-hero pirate with a pink submarine killing subaquatic aliens who have flooded the Earth and begun using humans for livestock. Along the way you'll murder swarms of endangered sea turtles, kill pods of orca (who gladly devour the scientists you're trying to rescue if left unchecked), and deal with frustrating collision detection and other awkward gameplay mechanics.

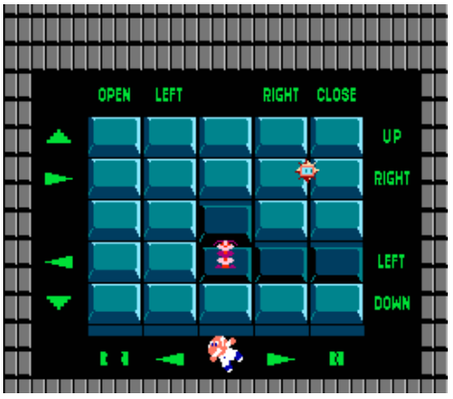
Sqoon feels a little like *Defender* under water but its fixed, right-scrolling gameplay lacks the pacing and general depth found in that arcade classic. There are other things in the game that likewise have always left me scratching my head, like visual content that seems to conflict with Nintendo's strict policies of the NES era. I still don't know what a bare-chested mermaid with a rosary has to do with aliens and pirate-piloted pink nuclear submarines (she's right there on the title screen) but sure, why not? As an Irem title the game is certainly part of an excellent pedigree (*R-Type*, *Metal Storm*, and a host of other classic arcades), but it feels like a black sheep compared to the rest of the company's library. Strangely enough the game has become a collector's item in recent years, mostly due to rarity (it wasn't exactly the most popular shooter back in the day), but its novelty makes for a great conversation piece in my collection. – Kale Menges, artist and game developer

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Stack-Up

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1985.





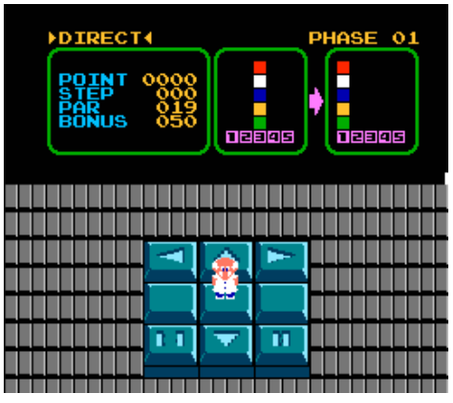
One of two games designed specifically to work with Nintendo's R.O.B. peripheral (the other being *Gyromite*), *Stack-Up* originally came packaged with five trays and five round colored blocks (red, white, blue, yellow, and green), but these days a complete copy is hard to find. In this game you use the control pad to guide Professor Hector as he jumps on top of command keys depicted on screen. This prompts the Robotic Operating Buddy to pick up and move the physical soft plastic blocks to five pedestals. The objective is to transport the blocks from a starting configuration to a final configuration. There are three modes of play. Direct has you trying to stack certain blocks in as few moves as possible. In the Memory game you program R.O.B. so he will arrange blocks in a specific order. As you guide Hector in the Bingo option, two onscreen aliens called Flipper and Spike attempt to disrupt your commands as you try to move blocks from one location to another to complete a pattern. You receive a score at the end of each game, with bonuses awarded for how quickly you complete the puzzle.

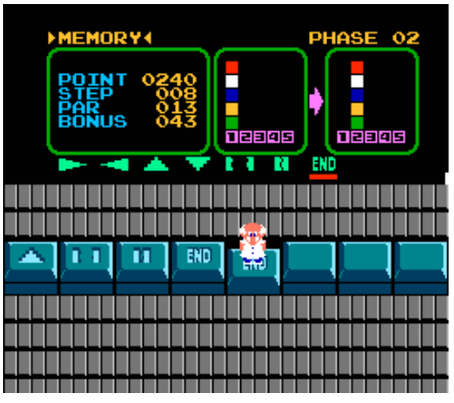
Notable Quotable:

"*Stack-Up* is less a game than a half-hearted tech demo for Nintendo's hardly-used but much-beloved peripheral . . . makes R.O.B. the star of the show, but the three mini-games do nothing but highlight his weaknesses. All he does is move discs from one place to another, and he needs Professor Hector's suddenly superb jumping skills (remember when he couldn't jump at all in *Gyromite*?) to even accomplish that." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"Remembering where the robot will be positioned after a series of moves is surprisingly fun, especially in later rounds where you sit nervously waiting to see if you've not only inputted everything correctly, but whether R.O.B. will successfully pull off the moves without knocking over blocks . . . moments that are genuinely hilarious if you're with a group of people that can take pleasure in your failures. It's very satisfying when you get it correct, though, as you feel like you've achieved something by programming a robot . . . The main issue with the entire game is that it has no way to confirm if you've constructed the blocks correctly and it relies on complete trust from the player; therefore you can simply move on to the next round with no repercussions." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

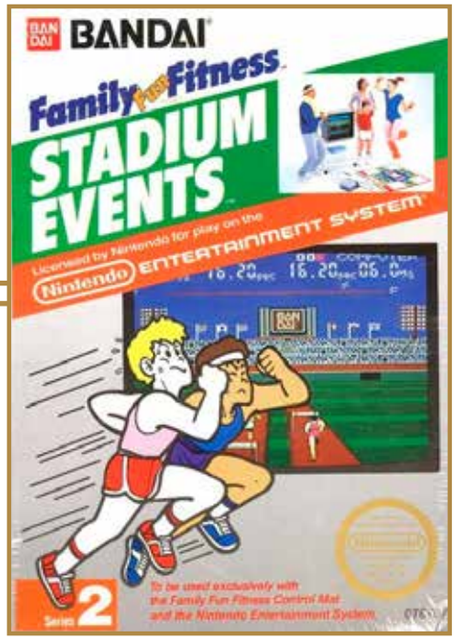




©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Stadium Events

PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: TRY.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Track & Field, 1–6 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.



Later published by Nintendo as *World Class Track Meet*, *Stadium Events* is one of the rarest licensed games in the NES library, thanks to Nintendo forcing the game off the market once they began producing it under the *WCTM* moniker. The cartridge contains four events: 100M Dash, 110M Hurdles, Long Jump, and Triple Jump, each requiring the use of the Family Fun Fitness control mat (later released by Nintendo as the Power Pad). The events are viewed from behind, with players (standing alone or side by side with a second player) hopping, stepping, jogging in place, and otherwise pressing buttons on the mat with their feet to get the onscreen characters to run and jump. Tournament and The Olympics modes are available, the latter of which lets 1–6 players perform all four events in a row. Computer opponents are named after animals: Turtle, Bear, Horse, Rabbit, Bobcat, and Cheetah.

Memories: Back in the 1990s I would buy super cheap games at FuncoLand, the chain store that later became GameStop, and sell them to a couple of different pawn shops near my house. Once I found a *Stadium Events* cartridge, having no idea it was special (nobody cared that it was rare at the time), for just $0.29 (yes, you read that right) and sold it to one of those shops for $5 (sigh . . .). *Stadium Events* has gotten tons of publicity in recent years because of its rarity and value, and it is often the last standard release game completists need for their NTSC NES collection. In 2017 a factory sealed copy of the game sold at auction for approximately $42,000.

Notable Quotable:

"2,000 copies is believed to have been the total distribution tally, but that doesn't consider how many of those were sold prior to Nintendo's recall. Some have suggested that no more than 200 actually made it into NES owners' homes. It should be noted that PAL versions were not recalled and are not worth as much (even though many eBay sellers try to pass them off as rarities or jump on the hype of the rare North American version)." —Racket Boy (www.racketboy.com)

Notable Quotable:

"It's estimated that 10,000 copies were initially produced by Bandai in 1987 to be used with their innovative Family Fun Fitness pad controller . . . To this day nobody knows what happened to the original copies. Even former Nintendo employees are vague about where they ended up, and in 2016 renowned games tester Howard Phillips told ESPN: 'If there were 10,000 I don't know where they ended up. I don't have recollection of us burying them in a landfill. Destroying them or reworking them would've been a laborious task. Getting the label off would've been overly laborious on a per-unit basis. So . . . the rarity is a mystery, isn't it?'" —Simon Lindley (news.justcollecting.com)

Notable Quotable:

"There's nothing really special about the game, and if it used a normal controller it would be rather mundane. However, the Power Pad really does add to the experience in an indescribable way, and it's a lot of fun with multiple people struggling with their stamina! The difficulty of the game obviously relies on your reactions, but more importantly your fitness level. The action is high intensity, so it can get tiring even after a few minutes of play. The graphics are excellent, and although they don't have any scaling effects, they do a nice job of conveying depth in the scenery and track. *Stadium Events* is unlikely to be listed in anyone's list of top NES games, but the Power Pad is a key feature in making the experience fun. The single player mode is shallow, but it really comes alive with a group of people huddling around the mat until they collapse in a heap!" —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Stanley: The Search for Dr. Livingston

PUBLISHER: Electro Brain.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Adventure/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Set in the African Congo (circa 1871), *Stanley: The Search for Dr. Livingston* puts you in the role of an adventurer on a perilous mission to find an explorer who got lost while searching for the legendary Temple of Am-Zutuk. You begin the game equipped with a backpack (which contains an auto-gyro copter), Dr. Livingston's notes, and your fists. Throughout the game you can add a number of weapons to your arsenal, including stronger fists, a machete, a blowgun, rocks, bows and arrows, a club, spears, knives, and a battle axe. These will come in handy when you are battling alligators, soldiers, guards, snakes, giant spiders, tigers, mosquitoes, tribesmen, flying tiki masks, and other jungle natives. In addition to weapons you can find extra lives, hearts, keys, maps, notes, water, lightning stones, a grapnel and rope, shields, an iron breastplate, and much more. These items will help you do such things as access certain areas, replenish your health, open doors, and climb steep cliffs. You must discover on your own what many of the items do as you run, jump, climb, crawl, hover, and otherwise make your way through the perilous jungles, ruins, and caves. Some areas feature disappearing and reappearing platforms. You'll occasionally communicate with nonplayable characters to access news and information. Unfortunately the game is hard to find.

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"The sheer size of the game is hugely impressive and the variety of stages kept me hooked. Add in the reward of exploration with power-ups and items and there always felt like there was something to do . . . punching a hilarious flying tiger felt pretty satisfying, though without power-ups it took forever smacking even the simplest of creatures' faces in." —Jim Evans (*Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the NES Library*)

Notable Quotable:

"To even think about completing this one you have to sink hours upon hours of trial-and-error gameplay into the endeavor, and unless you are using some sort of online guide it's going to take you at least a week before you know what the hell you are doing. It actually took me three months to conquer a ROM version of the game, complete with save states and the ability to look up cheats on YouTube . . . the big 'innovation' in this game is that, unlike seemingly every other game on the NES, merely walking into enemies doesn't hurt you. Instead, your character can only be injured if they directly attack you." —The Internet is in America (internetisinamerica.blogspot.com)

Star Force

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft/Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.

Based on the 1984 Tehkan arcade game, *Star Force*, which takes place in "futuristic" 2010, has you battling the murderous planet Gordess, which is divided into 24 flyover sections. Each section is swarming with zigging, zagging, swirling enemy ships that are simplistic in design (squares, circles, diamonds, letters, and other shapes), and each section has ground-based targets that are destroyed via your ship's rather pragmatic firepower (meaning there are no bombs or other air-to-surface weaponry). Enemies have odd names, such as Titta, Faillar, Meeuws, and Splitta. Your ship is called the Final Star and it fires a Star Beam Gun, which is a dual-firing mechanism. Occasionally you can grab a power-up that makes the bullets and the ship move 1.5 times faster. One unusual aspect of this otherwise ordinary (if challenging and enjoyable) game is the ship's imperviousness to light contact on its wings, meaning destroying enemies from the side is a workable strategy.

Memories: I read in a book once that the arcade version of *Star Force* was the first shooter with ground targets and enemy bosses. While it is indeed an early example of those elements in the genre, it certainly wasn't first. *Zaxxon*, which hit the arcades in 1982, had a boss enemy, while *Xevious*, which came out in 1983, had ground targets.

Notable Quotable:

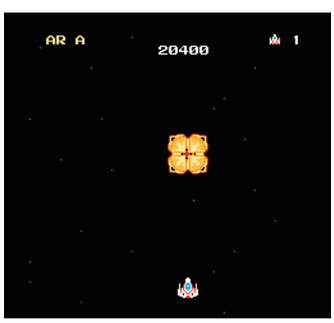
"The American NES version of *Star Force* was released two years after its Japanese counterpart. Because of this, significant differences can be found between the two—the soundtrack and the sound effects were enhanced and some of the graphics were altered. This was most certainly part of an attempt to make the port feel closer to the arcade." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

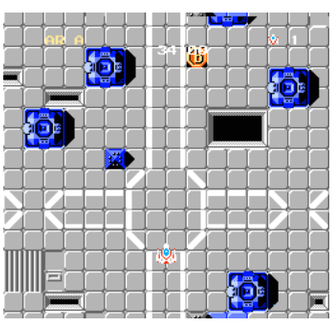
Notable Quotable:

"Absolutely loaded with fast action . . . While there is nothing especially original about the story of this game or its execution, fans of action games will have a ball with it because of the wild abandon of its sheer speed. This is one time when the rapid fire turbo button of the NES Advantage joystick really comes in handy. *Star Force* may not require a lot of thinking, but it sure is a lot of fun to play!" —*Computer Entertainer* (December 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"*Star Force* is a terrible game. It consists of 24 dull, uninspired levels of vertical shooting that simply become more and more painful to play as you progress through the game . . . the enemies' patterns are simple and very similar to each other . . . dull, uninspired enemies and environments that constantly reappear . . . although the enemy patterns are simple, a lack of continues and the slow speed of your ship make the game excruciatingly hard." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

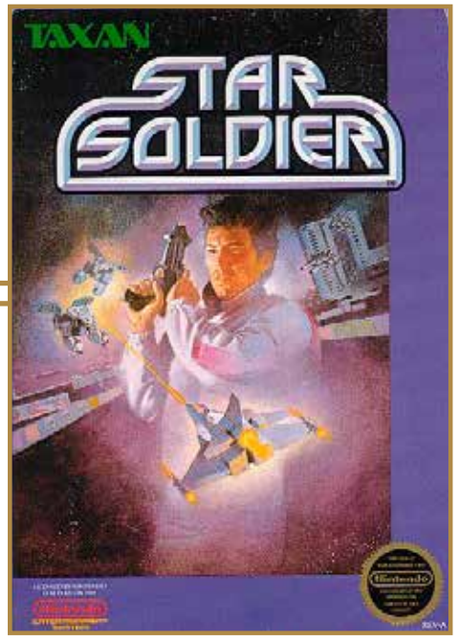


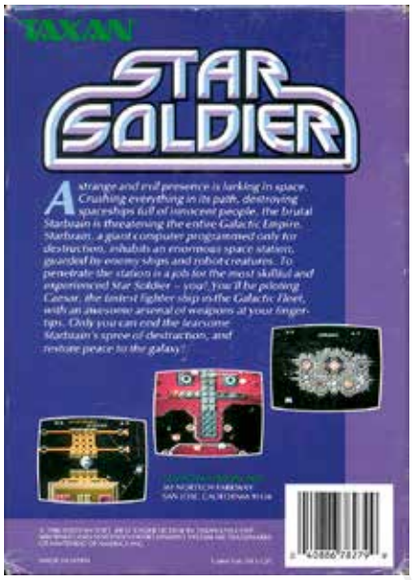


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Star Soldier

PUBLISHER: Taxan.
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.





Star Soldier has you guiding a quick-moving aircraft over a floating, 16-stage space station, firing double shots straight up the screen at enemy ships and robot creatures—some mechanical, such as a Starship Enterprise lookalike, and some resembling giant insects and other creatures, such as butterflies, crabs, and snails. The flying enemies move in a variety of patterns and there are ground-based targets to shoot as well (though, like *Star Force*, no air-to-surface weaponry), including eyeballs, snakes, skulls, and stars. Strange sub-bosses appear in four sections, then converge in the middle of the playfield to form a blue face, which is kind of creepy. Shooting P icons releases capsules that can be grabbed to increase the ship's speed and give it shields. Capsules also power up the ship to fire more bullets more quickly, behind you, and in five directions. At the end of each stage you must destroy the evil Starbrain or repeat the level from the midpoint. One unusual feature is the Trap Zone, which lets players fly under certain segments of the space station to avoid enemies. *Star Solider* was clearly inspired by *Star Force*, right down to the strange enemy names, in this case Beeq, Butterfu, Temees, and Sirant, among others.

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

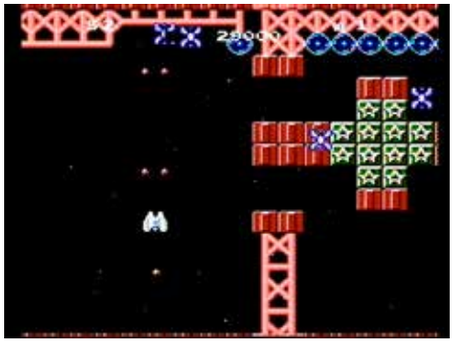
"Hard as nails . . . I recommend that you play this one with a controller that has turbo fire . . . you are woefully underpowered for the majority of the game and must rely on movement and precision aiming . . . super challenging because it's easy to crash into things . . . Visually *Star Soldier* is not the most exciting game out there, but most of the old school Nintendo spaceship shooters all kind of look like this. In the gameplay department *Star Soldier* is one of the better ones." —80s Comics (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"*Star Soldier* is a bare bones affair with endless waves of enemy ships and recycled stages. It manages to be a more compelling experience than its many peers of the time thanks to the rather impressive Starbrains and the simple (yet effective) weapon system. But *Star Soldier* has a couple of annoying flaws—the ability to fly underneath the scenery is more confusing than useful, the game is incredibly hard, and stages are extremely repetitive. In all *Star Soldier* is a decent shooter." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Throughout there are enemies flying from every direction waiting to crash into you, and if they don't get in your way it seems bullets fly from every direction ready for you to go into them . . . The difficulty may put off the more casual player, which is a shame, because given the chance, the game at times can be rewarding as heck . . . nice to just shoot anything and everything to progress . . . monotony of the levels in places, in terms of the enemies you encounter, the design of the background, and the Star Brain encounter at the end of each stage. It can become repetitive, but the level of difficulty involved may keep you from getting bored and make you want to keep pushing further." —Arcade Attack (www.arcadeattack.co.uk)



Star Trek: 25th Anniversary

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Interplay Productions.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Graphic Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

While in the vicinity of Sigma Iotia, collecting data on strange disturbances in the local gravitational and magnetic fields, fluctuations produced a hole in space. Luckily a space distortion threw the starship Enterprise and her crew into a safe (but uncharted) territory before it could be sucked into this rip in space. As Captain Kirk, your job is to return to the Iotian system and find a way to reverse the expanding rip in space before it destroys the entire galaxy. You control navigation, communication, and battle tactics from the ship's bridge. To help you with your mission, you've got the finest crew in Starfleet: Commander Spock (science), Chief Engineer Scott, Lieutenant Uhura (communications), Chekov (navigational/helm), Sulu (navigational/helm), and Doctor McCoy. You can go to each of these experts in their respective fields at any time for status reports. Like in the *Star Trek* TV show, you must choose a landing party and beam down to strange planets. You can use members of your primary crew or choose from experts in biology, history, geology, and security. The landing party's job is to look for such items as dilithium crystals that provide the Enterprise with power. You can talk to inhabitants of the planets, analyze plant life, and evaluate ancient artifacts. At times you will need to use your phaser weapon to kill or stun aliens who are less than friendly. Only Kirk and the security guards are authorized to use phasers. While aboard the Enterprise you must sometimes defend your ship against other vessels by firing phasers and photon torpedoes. You can communicate with certain ships to gain information.

Memories: As a major *Star Trek* fan from way back, I can say that *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary* does about as good a job as you could expect from the 8-bit NES in evoking the mood and look of the classic television series. It even includes references to specific episodes. While I've seen all 79 episodes many times I still watch one from time to time, usually on DVD, since the streaming episodes on Netflix have those ill-fitting CGI effects tacked on. I prefer the charming (if primitive) original special effects.

Notable Quotable:
"On the whole a mediocre *Star Trek* interpretation whose novelty rapidly wears off. The lack of excitement means most players soon lose interest, but *Star Trek* fans are likely to get more out of this than most." —*Nintendo Magazine System* (November 1992)

Insider Insight: I got into the *Star Trek* franchise at a young age, watching episodes of *The Next Generation* with my father and catching the original series movies when they occasionally aired on TV. One day during this time, while staying with my aunt, we went to a yard sale, where I discovered a box of NES games. I owned most of them, but when I saw the familiar faces of Kirk and Spock on an NES label I knew I had to grab it!

It was a cool experience being on the bridge of the Enterprise, issuing commands to the familiar crew. At first I was a bit disappointed when the game spent the bulk of its time having me in control of away missions on various planets but I quickly got used to it. The game became more enjoyable as I went since most of the away mission time was spent solving mysteries instead of engaging in combat. That being said the space combat is nicely done, all taking place through the bridge's view screen. I had a blast with this game and it led to me getting the *Next Generation* game on Super Nintendo years later. —Chris Leathco, blogger at Retro Gaming Roundup, author of *Afterglow* and *The Virtual Boy Game Library*

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Star Trek: The Next Generation

PUBLISHER: Absolute Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering.
GAME TYPE: Space Combat Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

You are a Starfleet cadet and your instructor is Captain Jean Luc Picard. Via Holodeck simulation you'll commandeer the Starship Enterprise and utilize the skills of her crew, including Riker (mission control), Worf (tactical systems), Data (operations), LaForge (engineering), and O'Brien (transporter) to perform various missions. A relatively complex control scheme enables the crew to raise shields, fire phasers and photon torpedoes (during real time battle sequences), find intruders and beam them off the ship, repair life support systems, boost systems, go into orbit, reallocate power (by guiding a spark through a mazelike puzzle), set course and warp speed, perform sensor readings, and more. The game, which is harder to find than *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary*, features digitized faces of Picard and company and a passable rendition of the TV show theme song.

Memories: While I never really warmed up to this game (it's not one of my preferred genres for starters), I'm a huge fan of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* television series. After Kirk and Spock, Data is my favorite character in the franchise, and the show has terrific special effects. The scripts are usually very good as well. The program came out in 1987, the same year I got my NES, so that was a fun and exciting time for me to be a pop culture fan. In 1989, when I was working at Lone Star Comics, a customer of ours worked at a nearby TV station that aired the show. One day he let us come down to the station and watch that week's episode a few days early. What a treat that was!

Notable Quotable:

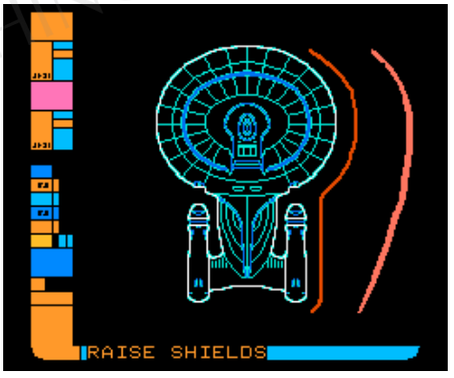
"A decent space combat simulator, it's not too bad. But as a translation of the TV series it falls short." —*Game Players* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"Trekkers might find this game a good warm up for the 16-bit and CD versions of the game hovering in the next sector. The frustrating controls and dull missions will ensure that most cadets are just not willing to make it so." —*GamePro* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:

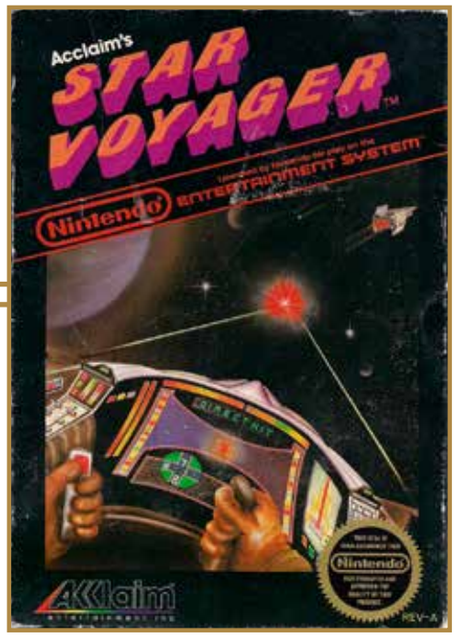
"I'm a fan of the *Star Trek* series and I don't really like this game. The control over the ship's operations was nifty, but not very interactive. The crew seems like cardboard cutouts because they lack the personality of the show characters . . . The graphics and sounds are nothing special . . . It plays like an interactive adventure game so don't expect much fighting." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1993)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Star Voyager

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: ASCII.
GAME TYPE: Space Combat Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.



Star Voyager puts players in the cockpit of a RH 119 warship equipped with laser cannons, barrier shields, a life support system, and a fully integrated biocomputer named Adam. The mission is to protect a stationary transport ship called CosmoStation Noah from intergalactic terrorists. This is done by selecting coordinates from a map screen; warping to various enemy sectors; avoiding black holes and asteroids; raising shields when under fire; visiting planets for engine and weapon upgrades; docking with space stations to effect repairs; and of course, shooting enemy ships. As with most space combat simulators the primary action is seen through the view screen of the ship, making the game a first-person shooter of sorts. There's an information screen as well.

Notable Quotable:

"This is more than a 'warp through space shooting down aliens' game as it takes some careful planning, flying, and shooting to accomplish your mission . . . The graphics are relatively simple; however, they are not that important to the play of the game . . . There are many different ways to approach your mission so it should hold you in front of your screen for many sessions." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1987)

Notable Quotable:

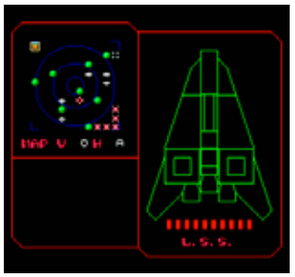
"The objects and scenery are pretty dull, even for 1986 standards . . . Fighting Molok Wardrivers is pretty frustrating at first, but is rewarding once you know what to do. You will notice that your equipment can get damaged, debilitating your fighting capacity. This can happen often, so you must think ahead and have an escape route to some space station. This is an excellent attribute that makes *Star Voyager* realistic." —Vimm's Lair (vimm.net)

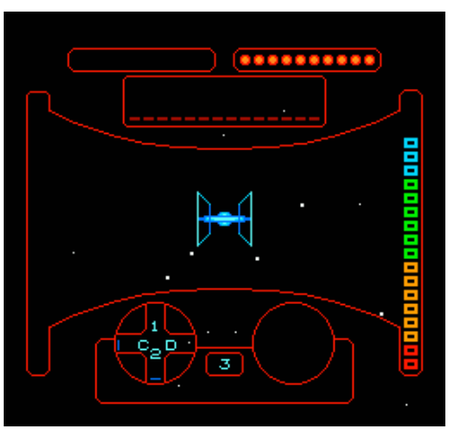
Notable Quotable:

"*Star Voyager* is not the greatest NES game of all time by any means. In fact, it's quite average. But the depth to the game (you actually have to read the instruction booklet!) makes it noteworthy for its time. It wasn't exactly a complex game, but strategy played a major role in what otherwise could have been just a typical arcade shooter like Atari's *Star Wars* . . . If you make it to the end of *Star Voyager* I commend and admire your abilities. But even if you never defeat the game (like me), you'll spend hours trying to do so." —Christopher Michael Baker (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are superb—especially the introductory animation—but most of the potential is squandered by the lack of varied environments . . . the game is shockingly simple in its premise, despite the story presented in the manual . . . Unfortunately the game is far less engaging than the story suggests . . . The audio is quite good, with an excellent title screen theme . . . The goal is defending your space station from the marauding army of invaders, but the execution of the premise ultimately results in a tedious, boring journey and squandered potential. Stay away from this one." —David Buck (nintendotimes.com)

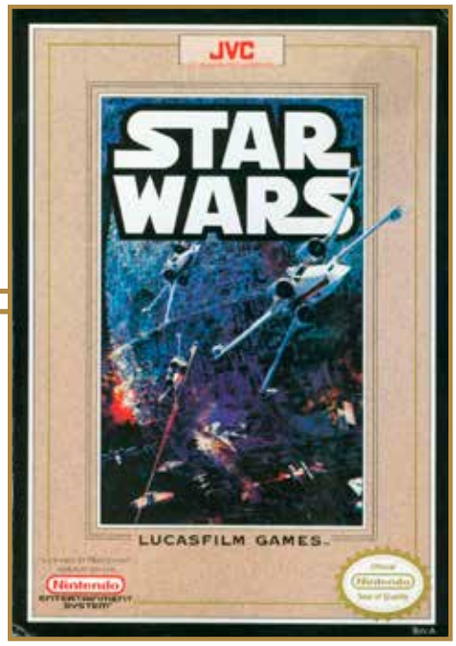




©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Star Wars

PUBLISHER: JVC.
DEVELOPER: Lucasfilm Games/ Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



The advent of the NES meant games with longer, more diverse levels. *Star Wars* for the beloved console was the first video game to reenact more than just a few select scenes from the 1977 film. Players must do the following: pilot a land speeder on Tatooine; rescue Princess Leia; survive the trash compactor; navigate the Millennium Falcon through an asteroid field; guide an X-Wing Fighter on a mission to destroy the Death Star; battle bad guys with blasters and a light saber; run and jump on perilous platforms; and climb ladders, enter doors, and ride elevators. You'll discover other activities as well. You can play as Luke Skywalker—who wields a light saber—the entire game, or replace him with Princess Leia or Han Solo when they join your party. C-3PO's comments can help you go in the right direction while R2-D2 regenerates your shields on the X-Wing and displays a map of the Death Star Hallways. Obi-Wan Kenobi speaks the wisdom of the Jedi Knight and can use the Force to resurrect Han or Leia five times. Enemies to battle in this game include such nasties as Jawas, Banthas, Boba Fett, Womp Rats, Flying Insectoids, and of course, Stormtroopers.

Memories: My big brother and I saw *Star Wars* at the local mall theater back in 1977, the year it came out. While I didn't fully understand every plot point, I absolutely loved it, especially R2D2 and C3PO. The NES game doesn't live up to the legacy of the film (How could it?), but it is certainly playable.

Notable Quotable:

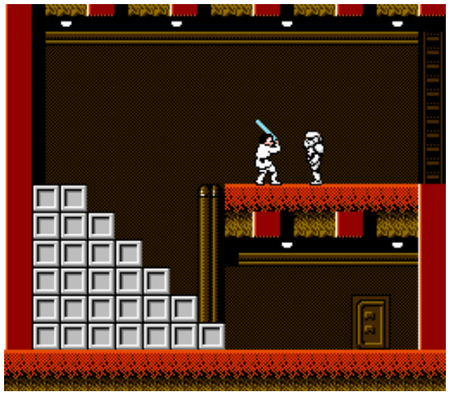
"With great graphics, well-chosen colors, nicely drawn characters and landscapes, hot sound FX, strong animation, and great playability, measure for measure *Star Wars* on the NES is just as exciting as the film." —*N-Force* (July 1992)

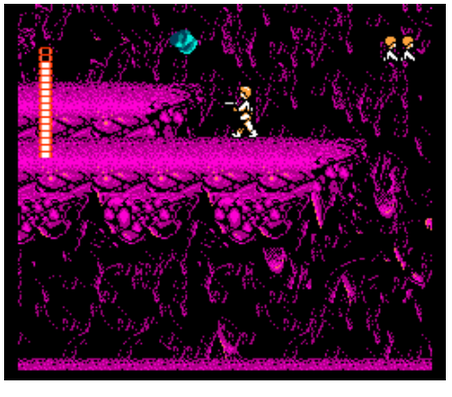
Notable Quotable:

"*Star Wars* is a pretty cool adaptation of the movie on which it is based. It combines basic RPG elements with a number of different play themes and static intermissions to move the story along. The setup is painfully tedious at times when you have to repeat areas but all in all it's a good effort." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Smooth scrolling, topnotch sprites, and wonderful backdrops . . . contains a special music chip that enhances the NES sound capabilities . . . thumping renditions of the movie themes as well as brilliant sound effects . . . Definitely the best film tie-in on the NES and one of the best Nintendo carts for ages!" —*Computer and Video Games* (February 1992)

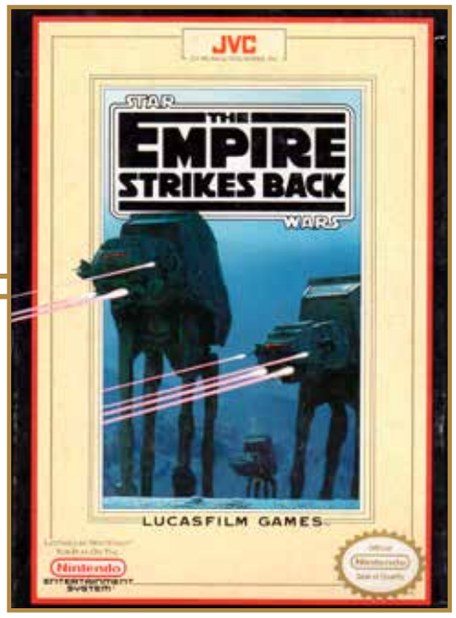




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back

PUBLISHER: JVC.
DEVELOPER: Lucasfilm Games/ Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



As with *Star Wars* for the NES, *The Empire Strikes Back* lets players go on a diverse adventure with many play styles. The game follows the 1980 feature film fairly closely, giving you, as Luke Skywalker, the opportunity to embark on a long adventure that features much more than simple platforming. You'll ride a Taun-Taun through the ice caverns of Hoth; fight your way past Stormtroopers and probe droids in Echo Base; commandeer a disabled AT-ST Walker; look for Yoda and battle creatures on Dagobah; engage and destroy cloud cars and TIE Fighters while flying your X-Wing to Bespin; battle AT-AT Walkers while aboard a snow speeder; face Bespin guards, bounty hunters, and cannon walkers in the corridors of Cloud City; rescue Han Solo and Princess Leia; take down Boba Fett's ship, the Slave I; and find and confront Darth Vader. You wield a blaster and a light saber, and you can pick up icons for various force powers, including the ability to levitate, jump farther and higher, run faster, reflect enemy shots, and increase the power of your weapons. An adaptation of *Return of the Jedi* was in production for the NES but it was never released.

Notable Quotable:

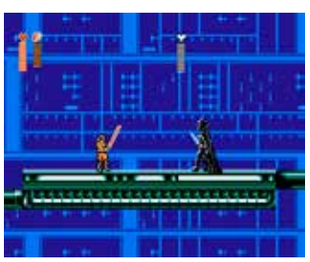
"While this game does manage to capture the feel and continuity of the movie on which it is based, many of the set-ups are too complicated or too laborious . . . Instead of appreciating the fine graphics and general gameplay the action gets bogged down in specific areas." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1992)

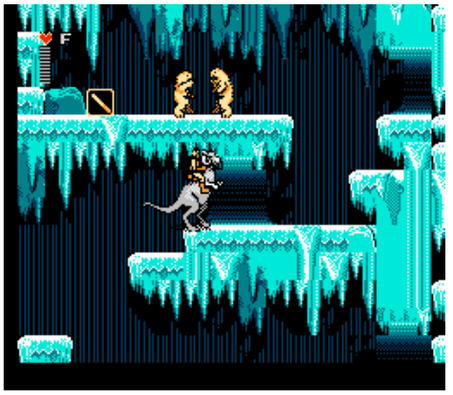
Notable Quotable:

"A nice touch when you're Luke is the digitized image of Ben Kenobi giving you guidance during your mission . . . The graphics and sound are really good but the characters tend to be on the small side. The opening cinematic display is terrific! The controls for *Empire* also handle very well . . . the most admirable attribute is the gameplay . . . even the most talented of gamers will have a rough time but you'll keep coming back for more." —Bill Schultz (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Compared to the first *Star Wars* game for the NES *Empire Strikes Back* represents a huge step forward . . . makes an effort to capture the spirit of the saga, with graphics and music that are faithful to the film . . . looks terrific . . . some tedious jumping . . . but the controls tend to be forgiving . . . the characters are realistically proportioned and nicely animated . . . standard platform fare but there are two exceptional shooting stages . . . Lucasfilm was clearly headed in the right direction, as the SNES versions would ultimately prove." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)





© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Starship Hector

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter/Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

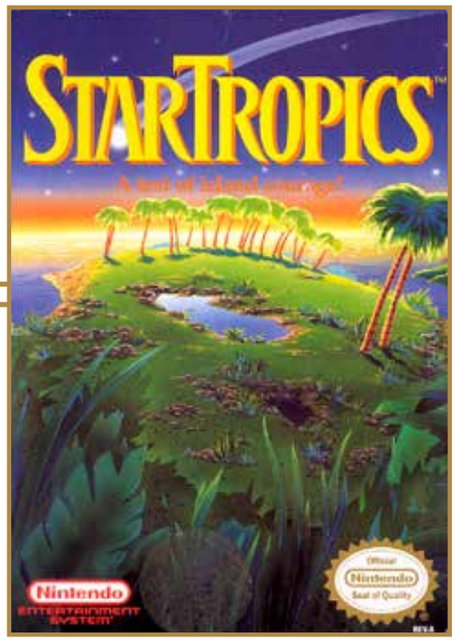
The follow-up to *Star Soldier, Starship Hector* has players piloting a ship that looks like the Starship Enterprise over land and sea, dropping bombs on ground-based targets (including trees and gun turrets) and firing bullets straight ahead at biomechanical creatures that fly in zigzagging patterns. Enemies have such quirky names as Balser, Tubber, Dasser, and Capzer. Unlike *Xevious*, a similar game, *Starship Hector* includes horizontal levels (à la *Life Force* and *Stinger*) in which the player's ship is viewed from the side. Here you shoot straight ahead to the right, but bombs drop diagonally and move along the ground when they reach it. There are no weapon power-ups, unfortunately, but dropping bombs on certain structures releases items that can replenish the ship's energy. There are six empires (levels) to battle through: Incaic, Mayan, Atlantis, Egyptian, Moo, and Yamataikoku. At the end of each one is a boss, such as a battery of cannons, a giant statue, a golden pharaoh, or a giant brain in a jar. To earn bonus points you can shoot hidden panels spelling out HECTOR. In addition to standard mode there are timed competition modes of two and five minutes. The action takes place in the Star Year 2038, after the Fourth World War destroyed the inhabitants of Earth.

Notable Quotable:
"I miss the fast and intense gameplay *Star Force* and *Star Soldier* had to offer. The lack of power-ups is a bit disappointing, and I feel that the alternance of horizontal and vertical stages slows down the game's pace . . . a decent shooter." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:
"What the hell is a shooter without cool weapons? Surprisingly still a decent game in spite of the fact that the odds are heavily stacked in the enemies' favor . . . Without overpowered weapons to fall back on survival relies on your piloting skills . . . bullets fly freely, and the enemies even try to suicide bomb you . . . The vertical levels are the most difficult, as it is very hard to discern which targets can only be destroyed using bombs or airborne fire . . . At a mere six stages this is a pretty brief engagement, but in my estimation only the most dedicated shooter fans will see the end, especially as there are no checkpoints . . . looks considerably better than similar titles in the genre released in the same time frame, to say nothing of its superiority over its sparse predecessors." — Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

StarTropics

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D3.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



StarTropics is similar to *The Legend of Zelda* but is set in a tropical island paradise. Mike Jones comes to visit his uncle but discovers that he has been kidnapped by aliens, sending the intrepid young man on an exotic adventure. In the overworld areas (viewed from a top-down perspective) Mike walks around talking to people or travels about via submarine. While in dungeons Mike battles creatures, jumps over gaps (something not seen in *Zelda*), and opens doorways (by defeating certain creatures or jumping on buttons). Mike's primary weapon is a yo-yo. Other weapons and items he can obtain include a shooting star, a torch, a baseball bat, a slingshot, a miracle mirror (for reflecting back magic shots), spiked shoes, a super laser, a magic anklet (for jumping farther), a magic watch (for slowing or stopping enemies), and more. Originally packaged with a letter containing a vital secret code. See also: *Zoda's Revenge: StarTropics II*.

Notable Quotable:
"*StarTropics* is a magnificent *Zelda*-like addition to the video gaming library, perfect for players of all ages. One serious complaint: if you've advanced far in any level you start waaay too far back again once you've lost all your lives." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games 4* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"If you've played *Zelda* then imagine Link with a yo-yo and you basically have *Star Tropics*. While the quest is a bit challenging the game suffers from a lack of originality and quickly becomes tiring. Okay if you're into quest games and have nothing else to play." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"No island vacation is complete without robot-driven submarines, walking skull ostriches, and alien abductions. *StarTropics* features all these things and more in an adventure that mixes the exploration of an RPG with overhead action similar to the *Zelda* games. While there is a definite nostalgic charm about the whole affair it is tempered by some unfortunate flaws." —*Game Informer* (July 2005)

Notable Quotable:
"Your character moves on a grid . . . This can be particularly cumbersome in frantic situations like boss battles or when faced with a swarm of enemies . . . suffers from repetitiveness. Go to island, talk to islanders, go to dungeon, beat boss and repeat . . . Visually *StarTropics* is actually quite impressive for a NES title. The game features large sprites and detailed environments outside the dungeons . . . The soundtrack is also memorable, if not a little grating, but it sets the mood well." —Alex St-Amour (www.link-cable.com), playing the NES game downloaded to the Wii U

Insider Insight: *StarTropics* may not be a perfect video game but it sure was one of the most memorable, which is saying something considering the size and quality of the NES library. This game is legendary among gamers of a certain age thanks to the whole "dip your uncle's letter in water" thing. When I played I had the letter, did the water thing, and it was awesome. My friend was not so lucky. When he got to that part he was completely confused. He had rented the game and it didn't come with the instruction manual. He had no idea what to do so he tried calling me. This was before cell phones and I was out riding my bike or something, so he was on his own. When he finally got in touch with me and told me how he got past it I couldn't help but be impressed. He actually sat there and entered every single number starting at 0 until he made it to 747, which was the actual code. It took him and his sister hours and I still can't believe they didn't just give up. —Kris Randazzo, host of the *Stone Age Gamer* Podcast, writer for *Nintendo Force Magazine*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Stealth ATF

PUBLISHER: Activision.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering.
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.

Stealth ATF puts players in the cockpit of a Stealth Advanced Tactical Fighter, which, according to the game's manual, is America's most closely guarded secret. As you fly top priority combat missions around the world, firing cannons and missiles at enemy planes, you can perform barrel rolls, loops, dives, and banks. To track an enemy you should keep an eye on the rather large radar scope. There are numerous indicators to monitor as well, including altitude, fuel supply, heading, angle of attack, and damage sustained (the bottom half of the screen displays the control panel). Stealth mode, which makes you invisible to the enemy, can be used only once per mission. If you perform especially well during a mission you'll play a bonus round where waves of enemy planes fly by without attacking. After each mission there's a side view landing sequence. For a safe landing you must execute the correct speed and angle of descent. An unusual two-player Dogfight mode lets the second gamer assume control of the enemy plane closest to the center of the view screen. *Stealth ATF* contains more than 100 global missions.

Notable Quotable:

"The music is terribly annoying . . . Not a whole lot of variety . . . doesn't require you to do much more than keep your plane in the air and shoot. There's not much strategy and not a lot of gameplay. The only reason to keep going is to see what the different backgrounds and landing scenes look like." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"This first-person air combat title attempts to be realistic but is a complete mess. The object is to destroy a certain number of enemy planes before returning to your base. Unfortunately the graphics are pitiful and the frame rate is hopelessly choppy. Your first-person view is little more than a flat horizon with some black enemy aircraft that occasionally flash across the screen . . . the rough animation makes it hard to get a bead on anything. Your best bet is to keep an enemy in view and hope you accidentally hit it . . . When you lose a dozen planes in a row just trying to land something is very, very wrong! As frustrating as it is ugly, *Stealth* is one to avoid." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

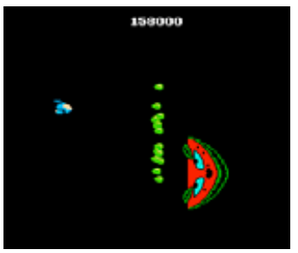
Notable Quotable:

"*Stealth ATF* isn't awful. It actually isn't too bad, but it doesn't know whether it wants to be *Top Gun* or a flight simulator, because for the most part enemies fly straight at you and you try to shoot them down when you first see them or launch missiles at them. But then they fly around behind you and you can try to dogfight with them, but that doesn't play well at all, so you're always better off just flying straight at them and then attempting to dodge whatever they shoot at you. You can try to shoot them from behind, but I found that I just ended up flying in circles and eventually ran out of gas . . . The graphics aren't too bad, the backgrounds are colorful, and the music's kind of catchy. But the gameplay is sluggish, and the fact is there's far better flight games on the NES. *Top Gun* in particular blows this away." — 80s Comics (YouTube)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Stinger

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter/Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.



In *Stinger* you pilot a jet fighter over land and sea, shooting such oddball enemies as radishes, donuts, footballs, clothes hangers, and vinyl records. Bosses include such characters as Sigmund Squidmund, Willie the Watermelon Head, Master Blaster (a boom box), and Solar B. Threeyes (a sun with a sinister face). Your jet fires cannons and drops bombs, and it shoots clouds to release bells. Grabbing a bell earns bonus points, but bouncing the bell around by shooting it turns the bell different colors. A colored bell grants a power-up, such as speed, dual cannons, lasers, or a force field barrier. Other power-ups include three-way fire, five-way fire, and behind-the-jet shots. Like most Konami games *Stinger* exudes playability. The two-player cooperative strategies, such as the ripple laser where you team up for extra firepower, are especially fun as you work your way through the game's seven levels of play: Island in the Pacific Ocean, Undersea Kingdom in the Indian Ocean, Small Country in Vast African Desert, Glacier Land Near Arctic Circle, Country in South America, Empire on the Edge of Space, and Outer Space, Where the Hostage is Hidden. As with *Life Force*, the game features horizontal and vertical scrolling. The Japanese version, *Moero TwinBee*, allowed for three-player simultaneous action.

Notable Quotable:
"Packs a mean punch and is going to have you begging for more . . . The scenario is jolly spiffy . . . It is a stunning game with some truly staggering power ups and fast, twisted zap the mothers action. Go get it!" —*Computer and Video Games* (April 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"This is a wild and wacky adventure as you shoot your way through some pretty crazy worlds . . . nonstop action of the craziest kind . . . silly looking enemies dance, soar, and float through the air . . . The graphics [are] colorful and cartoonish . . . This is one of those games that will undoubtedly give you 'numb thumb' but you'll have a hard time putting it down." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1987)

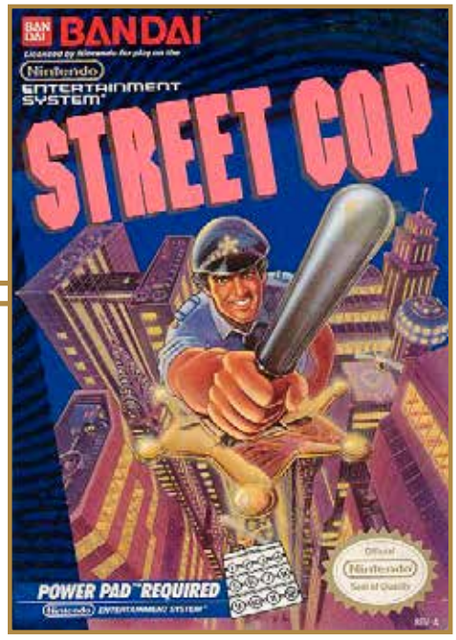
Notable Quotable:
"Its classic shmup gameplay still generally holds up . . . enemies spontaneously speed up, home in on you, swoop around in a circle, simultaneously spawn in all four corners, or fill the bottom of the screen . . . long, drawn out, repetitive, and downright boring at times . . . many sections of the stages are much more difficult than any boss the game has to offer . . . As a fan of the *TwinBee* series I must say that I expected much more out of *Stinger*." —A. J. Maciejewski (videochums.com)

Insider Insight: As a huge "shmup" fan I have a soft spot for the more unusual games in the genre, and *Stinger* is no exception. I don't recall the first time I played it, but I do know that it was one of the first NES titles that got me into exploring and playing Famicom games. *Stinger* is a localized port of *Moero TwinBee: Cinnamon-hakase o Sukue!*, the second title in Konami's *TwinBee* shooter franchise originally released in Japan for the Famicom Disk System. The *TwinBee* games are typically credited as being some of the earliest "cute-'em-ups," a distinctly lighthearted, graphically stylized subgenre that parodies or satirizes the definitively hardcore shoot-'em-up genre. The *TwinBee* titles are relentlessly entertaining and well-designed, featuring cute little spaceships, comical enemy designs, and a unique power-up system that involves juggling bells, but they offer every bit the challenge and depth of more seriously themed titles. Even though the game might not be the end-all-be-all specimen of its genre (even within the NES/Famicom library), I thoroughly enjoy *Stinger* (and the *TwinBee* series in general) for its gameplay and visual charm. More importantly, I'll always appreciate it as a gateway title that broadened my gaming interests and reinforced my love of Nintendo's 8-bit platform. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Street Cop

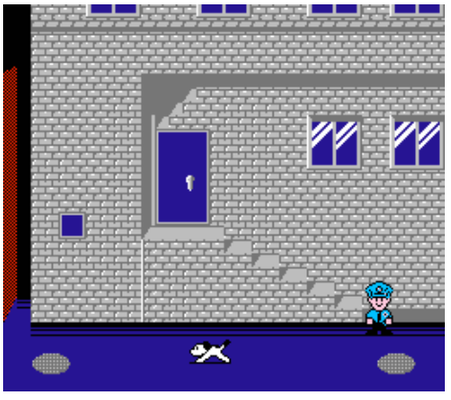
PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: Sonata.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



Street Cop requires the Nintendo Power Pad control mat, which you use to make your character, a rookie law enforcement officer, run (at three different speeds), jump, turn corners, enter buildings, hit bad guys with a baton, squat (both hands and feet must be pressed on the mat), and change directions. Stepping on the pad also operates various items you'll find on your adventure, including bombs, bullets (for firing your pistol), oranges (for throwing), turbo drinks (for running faster), hyper drinks (for temporary invincibility), dog whistles (for calling canine backup), and more. You'll work your way through six areas—Park, Harlem, Warehouse, Construction Site, Downtown, and Business District—chasing after and arresting bad guys within a specified time limit. A radar map at the bottom of the screen helps you track your prey, showing the position of both you and the bad guy. After you defeat a criminal another will take its place somewhere on the map. This interesting and unusual game is very hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"How does it control? As awkward as one might think. You can use the Power Pad exclusively to control the cop's every movement—running, changing directions, beating people, throwing apple cores—or use the controller to attack and the Power Pad to walk. The former is doable but still difficult, while the latter is confusing. It's best to use the Pad by itself, though the question 'Why can't I play this with a standard controller?' will never leave your mind. Graphically *Street Cop* has a washed-out, childish look—not an image you want a 'tough brawler' to put forth. The cop looks like he's fresh out of the third grade . . . I applaud Bandai for experimenting with the controls of the traditional brawler, but there's no reason the game should have to use the Power Pad to work. As I originally assumed when I turned it on, *Street Cop* is a clumsy tech demo disguised as an action title." — Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



SCANFER PUBLISHING

Street Fighter 2010: The Final Fight

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

A futuristic spinoff of the popular *Street Fighter* franchise, *Street Fighter 2010* is a difficult game that eschews the fighting genre the series is famous for in favor of side-scrolling action. You guide Ken (Kevin Striker in the Japanese version), who has created a serum transforming himself into the most powerful man in the galaxy, as he runs, climbs, jumps, punches, kicks, and shoots his way through five different planets, including a postapocalyptic Earth. Each planet has alien plant monsters, skeletal fish, centipedes, cyborgs, and the like to destroy, as well as projectiles to avoid, bosses to battle, and portals to find to progress through the stages. Ken is agile and can perform back flips and grab vertical surfaces (plants, walls, cliff sides, etc.) while in midair. He can also pick up power-ups to enhance the range and strength of his shooting attack, which he executes via punching and kicking motions. He can shoot in a variety of directions, including diagonally. According to the game's storyline Ken is on a quest to avenge the death of Troy, his scientist partner.

Notable Quotable:

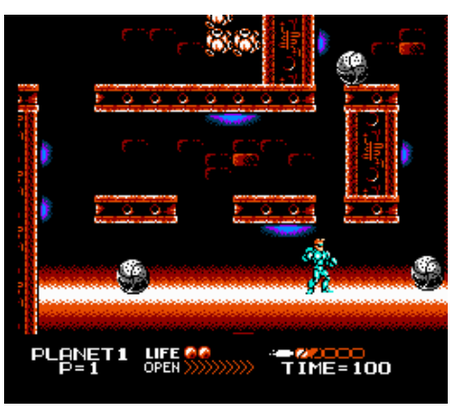
"Capcom's answer for fighting games is here, but it is only for the experts! *Final Fight* contains all the familiar elements of a good action game, but the techniques that are used are overly complicated and detract from the game." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Capcom crapfest . . . Hampered by an almost total lack of creativity and sluggish action, this game offers little in the way of fun or innovation. It's a miracle Capcom's *Street Fighter* series somehow survived this smear on its good reputation to remain one of the most bankable franchises in video games." —*Game Informer* #83 (March 2000)

Notable Quotable:

"This is a VERY HARD but surprisingly rewarding action platform game that gets better the more you play it. The story is completely bizarre but funny in a B-movie kind of way. While the game is at times VERY HARD for all the wrong reasons (poor disbursement of power-ups), if you played this game in the '90s and didn't like it, I would give it another try! You might be surprised—it is not as horrible as you remembered!" — Retrogame Man (retrogameman.com)

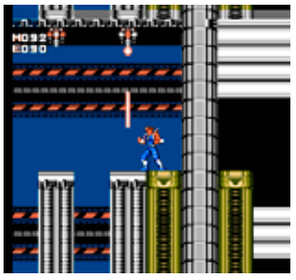


Insider Insight: My friend Chris had *Street Fighter 2010* when we were kids and I borrowed it from him one weekend. I liked it so much I couldn't wait to get a copy of my own. The music really drew me in, the opening song in particular. It's a great piece of music that gets overlooked as a shining example of what was capable audio-wise on the NES. But the thing that really made me want to get my own copy was the fact that all weekend long I could not for the life of me get past the second stage. How hard could a second stage boss be? When I finally did get the game I put all of my gaming time into beating it. When all was said and done I probably put almost as much time into trying to figure out a strategy to get past the second level as I did the rest of the game. To this day I get a tinge of anxiety whenever I play the game and fight that boss because of how much time it took me to beat him the first time. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Strider

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



Loosely based on Capcom's 1989 arcade game, *Strider* puts players in the title role of Strider Hiryu, a running, jumping, hack-and-slash secret agent who wields a cipher (called a laser sword in the more literally interpreted Sega Genesis version). The cipher is satisfying to use, and can even be aimed upward and used to jump and attack enemies straight above you. In addition to this attack, Strider can obtain special boots and a variety of "power tricks," including warp and three types of projectile weapons: fire, spark, and spark ball. Enemies run and jump (and occasionally fly and shoot) toward you, and you must also avoid or destroy gun emplacements, machinery, and the like. Some enemies drop capsules to replenish your hit points. The goal of each explorative level is to find keys and readable data disks, which are important for level progression to unlock doors and other areas of the stages. Players may also level up to increase their maximum health, acquire energy points for power tricks, and gain new abilities like sliding. Backtracking through the levels and even replaying them is required, though, since disks have to be analyzed to progress the story and unlock new stages and areas of stages already played. Coin-op fans will miss the faster, more action oriented approach, but adding RPG elements makes sense for the console format.

Notable Quotable:

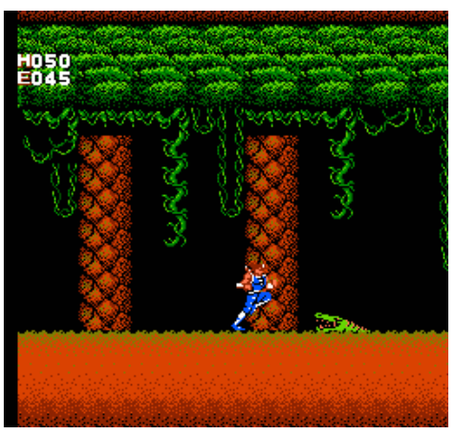
"Having to discover clues and hop back and forth between countries makes this game interesting. The only real drawback is that very few of the enemies put up much of a fight. The animation and scenery are exceptional." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games III* (St. Martin's Press, 1990)

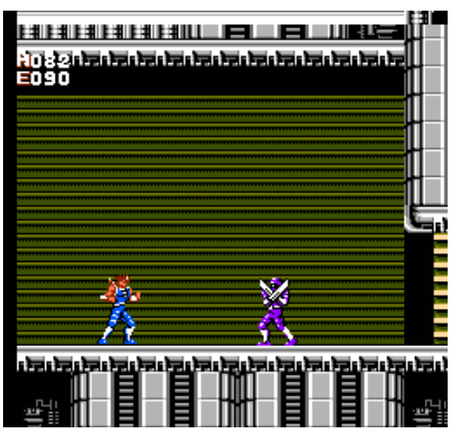
Notable Quotable:

"The NES version of *Strider* is not as good as the arcade, adopting a different storyline and look. The graphics and play are good, the maze is very complex, and [there are] many hidden items to find. The password isn't really needed because the game isn't too hard, but the last boss is very challenging." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"This is a good arcade game . . . There are a few places where you might get stuck, but otherwise we found the game quite easy to play. We finished the game in five days and that is the only reason why this game has a four-star rating instead of five stars. The graphics, story, and sound are excellent . . . a definite must buy for Nintendo gamers!" — *Dragon* (November 1989)





Insider Insight: The first time I fired up *Strider* on the Genesis I was confused. Having never played the coin-op, to me the NES version of *Strider* was the original. That type of thing seemed to happen a lot to me back in the '80s.

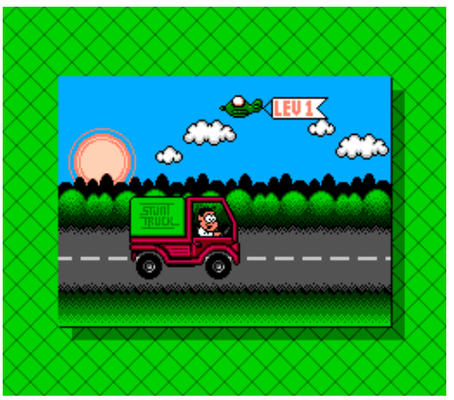
Let's be real—*Strider* on the NES is a hot mess. The jump physics are frustratingly unreliable, getting hit will sometimes knock you back and sometimes won't, and the wall jump . . . oh that wall jump—so frustrating!

But something about *Strider* just resonated with me. I loved the globe-hopping quest. I loved having to move back and forth between levels, opening up new areas with new gear and key cards previously attained, and even the story with its broken English translation. When I play *Strider* now I wonder why I ever suffered through it, but when the game was first released I was all in, despite its faults. —Greg Sewart, game developer, former Previews and Reviews Editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

© SCHIEFER PUBLISHING

Stunt Kids

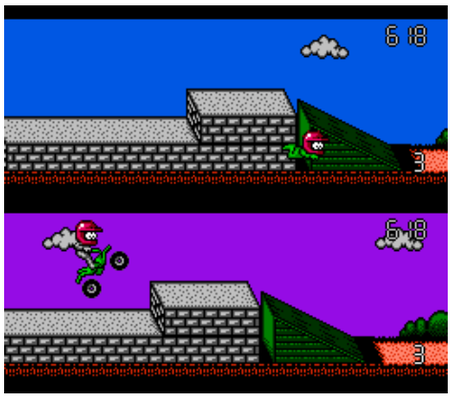
PUBLISHER: Camerica.
DEVELOPER: Codemasters.
GAME TYPE: Motocross Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

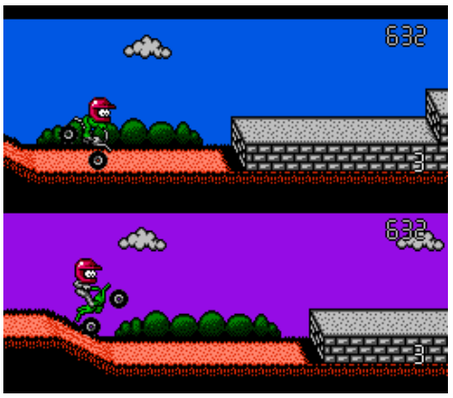


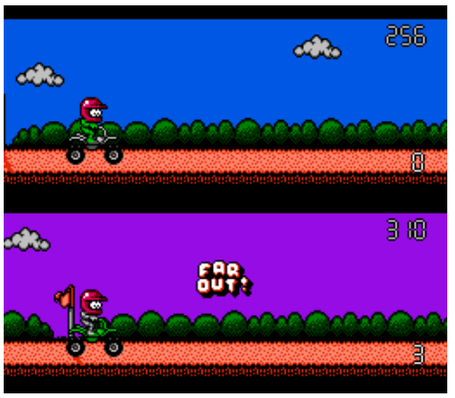
Stunt Kids has you racing your motorcycle—from the left to the right—through the Countryside, a Park, and a Construction Site, jumping on ramps and over rocks, brick walls, tree stumps, barrels, picnic tables, swings, water, lily pads, and other obstacles. There are also coins and fruit to collect and birds, frogs, snails, and other enemies to avoid, including a skateboarder named Menacing Mike. As in the far superior *Excitebike* the action is viewed from the side, and you can do wheelies to get bigger jumps off ramps and lower the front wheel for smooth landings on ramps. Turbo boosts are used for extra speed. The one player mode is a race against the clock while two-player action incorporates a split-screen perspective. Unlicensed and very hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"A horrible, unlicensed rip-off of *Excitebike* . . . pits two stubby things (presumably children because they're short, but they don't appear human) against each other . . . egregiously talented computer player . . . Despite the game's moniker there are no real stunts. If you can jump over the obstacles in each course while keeping your balance you're talented enough. Therein lies the problem: if you want to go fast and beat the clock and the CPU player you'll have to avoid every obstacle out there. If you hit anything you'll go flying off your bike, which shaves precious milliseconds off your time. Worse yet, it can be hard to gauge jump distances . . . It's infuriating to watch the computer do so well while your Stunt Kid gets sidelined by every nook and cranny of the track . . . *Stunt Kids* is one you should forget about—presuming you'd ever heard of it in the first place." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



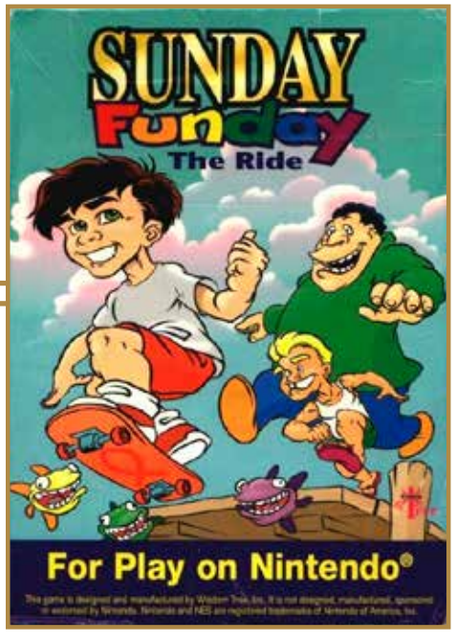


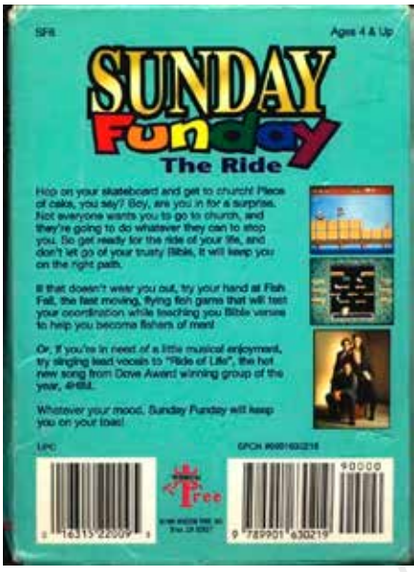


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Sunday Funday: The Ride

PUBLISHER: Wisdom Tree.
DEVELOPER: Color Dreams/ Wisdom Tree.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.





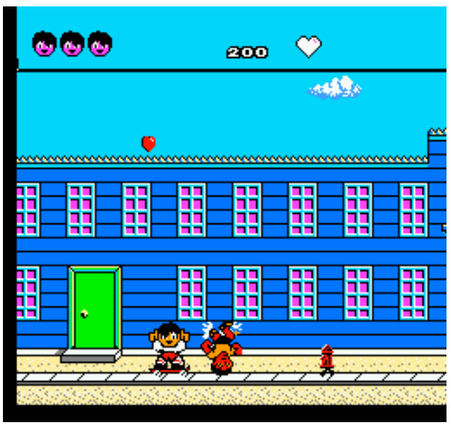
It's Sunday morning and you've got to make it to the church on time. You ride a skateboard down the street, on sidewalks and sewer pipes, across piers, and on platforms, avoiding obstacles and enemies including Rita Rich, who wants you to do chores; Businessman Bart, who thinks you should work on Sunday; and Dan the Beach Dude, who wants you to go surfing. Banana peels send you slipping while water balloons will soak you. A kiss from the lady on the pier slows you down, and Plumber Pete unleashes flying scrub brushes. Beware snapping fish on the pier and stalactites in the cave. Birds can fly you back to places you've already been. You are armed with a short spinning attack and a jump spin attack for thwarting your enemies. You can also pick up and throw items such as newspapers and grapefruit bombs. Spring boards send you soaring, while turning on light switches lets you see in the dark. The last commercially produced North American release for the NES during the console's 1985–1995 lifespan, *Sunday Funday* is a reskinned rendition of *Menace Beach*, but it does include a couple of mini-games not found in that game: Fishfall, in which players move a hand along the bottom of the screen, catching fish and throwing them up into a basket; and 4Him—The Ride, which lets you sing along to the Christian pop song "The Ride of Life" while the lyrics are displayed on the screen. Unlicensed and rare.

Notable Quotable:

"The level design, control, and gameplay are exactly the same as *Menace Beach*. The large-headed skateboarding kid is as unwieldy to control as ever and the levels are short and pointless . . . released in 1995, one year after the last licensed NES game and one year prior to the release of the Nintendo 64. Who could want it? Who could love it? Who the hell even knew about it?" —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

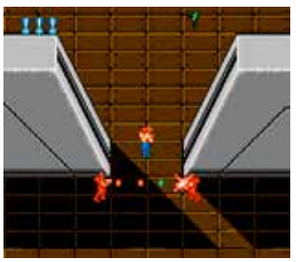
"While the hero in *Menace Beach* fights ninjas and evil clowns on his way to rescue his girlfriend from Demon Dan, the hero in *Sunday Funday* fights bullies and businessmen on his way to Sunday School. Additionally the hero carries a Bible in *Sunday Funday* but not in *Menace Beach*. Finally, in *Menace Beach* the hero's girlfriend appears wearing less and less clothing between levels, but she is replaced by a fully clothed Sunday school teacher in *Sunday Funday*." —nintendo.fandom.com



SCANNER PUBLISHING

Super C

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



This sequel to *Contra* finds soldiers Bill (codename Mad Dog) and Lance (code name Scorpion) taking on the vile alien warmonger Red Falcon once again. *Super C* features the same type of brutally intense, run-and-gun gameplay as its progenitor, but adds a couple of vertical scrolling, overhead stages to the mix, replacing the behind-the-back levels from *Contra*. As players run, jump, flip, and shoot their way through eight exciting levels—Gates of Fort Fire Storm, Fort Fire Storm's Warped Mind Command Center, Tropics of Torture, Lair of the Jungle, Massacre Mountains, Jagger Froid's Fruit-of-the-Doom Defense Line, Radioactive Lava Fields, and Red Falcon's Poison Palace—aliens constantly attack. There are giant bosses to battle as well. A machine gun that fires straight and diagonally is the standard weapon, but players can grab power-ups in the form of lasers, a flamethrower, rapid fire, barriers (for temporary invulnerability), mega shells, and the ever-popular spread gun, which is the most effective weapon. *Super C* is based on the arcade game *Super Contra* (Konami, 1988), with the title change made to avoid any connection to the real life Iran-Contra scandal. *Super C* is less detailed graphically than its coin-op counterpart but does feature three extra levels. Unlike *Contra*, *Super C* doesn't use the famous Konami code for 30 lives. Rather at the title screen you press a different code—Right, Left, Down, Up, A, B, Start—for 10 lives.

Notable Quotable:
"*Super C* has eight levels. To see the higher ones will require hours of practice and dynamite reflexes. If you enjoy a good shooter you should definitely add this one to your NES library." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"A fantastic shooter. Not content with just another sequel, Konami dives into new chip technology. The result is a game with unequaled graphics, sounds, and spectacular gameplay . . . truly outstanding . . . Captures the feel and play of the coin-op." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"*Super C* certainly doesn't reinvent the wheel from the first game, but it does do away with a few of its more annoying modes, such as the faux-3D, while tightening the basic shooting/platforming segments and adding some very difficult top-down portions." —Jim Vorel (www.pastemagazine.com)

Insider Insight: July 1990 was life changing. I was a "good boy" the whole year. I was student of the month that past April, which was when Konami released *Super C* on the NES. I saw the posters. I saw the game being played on TVs outside of stores. I waited two months for my birthday. I was impossible. I needed it. I had to have it. Having played the hell out of the original game with my dad and it being the first game we beat together, I wanted the adventure to continue.

So on that fateful day, July 13, 1990, I had it all planned out. I was going to play the game all day and get so good that by the time my dad got home from work we'd beat it without using any cheats. A boy can dream, right? Well, that was the plan.

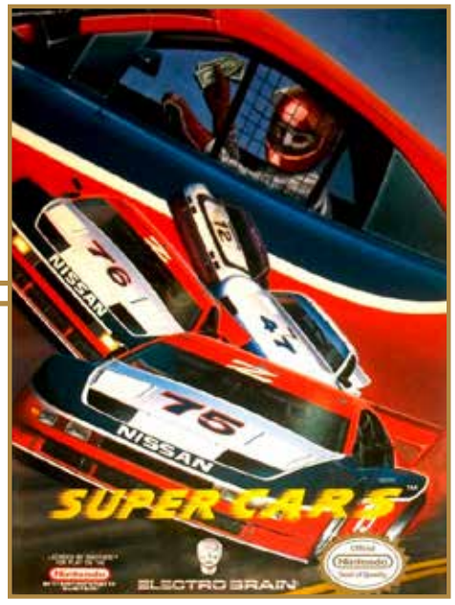
For some reason that year my parents gave us (my twin and me) our gifts when my dad got home from work, so the 2,555-day-old version of me at that time was essentially a walking time bomb. No more waiting. I was done. So when the candles blew out I didn't even want the cake. I certainly didn't want the clothes Grandma gave, or the art set from Uncle Mark. There was a rectangular box that I knew was my game. I wanted that.

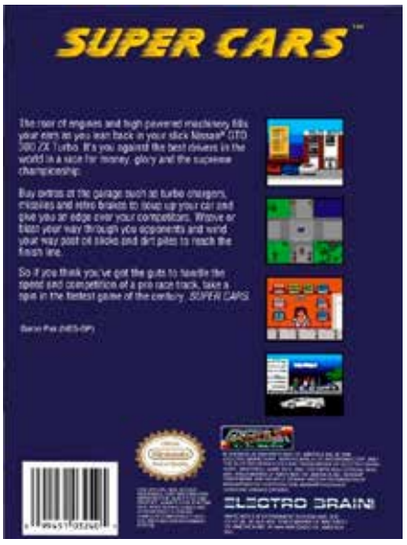
To my disbelief it was *Operation Wolf*, a game we had played together in the past that I enjoyed, but it wasn't *Super C*. I wouldn't touch it. I just threw an Eric Cartman-sized fit. Two days later I was the proud owner of *Super C*. And I beat it myself. Sorry, Dad. You awoke the sleeping dragon that day and he's never slept since. —Patrick Hickey Jr., author of *The Minds Behind the Games* book series

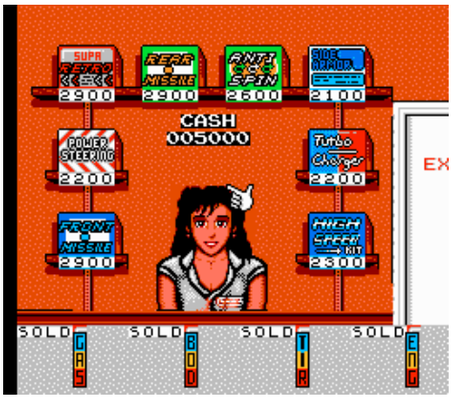
© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

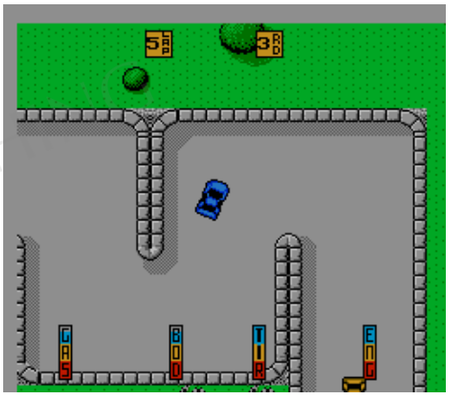
Super Cars

PUBLISHER: Electro Brain.
DEVELOPER: Gremlin Graphics.
GAME TYPE: Sports Car Racing/Demolition/Combat Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.









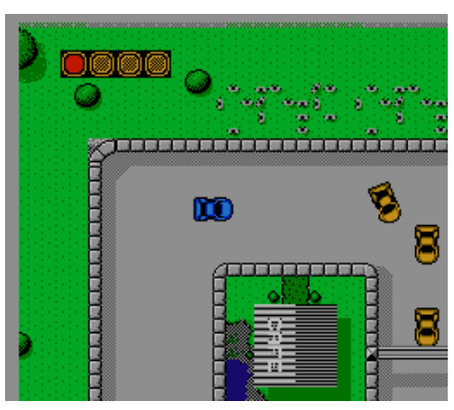
Super Cars has players racing against other cars around twisting, turning streets. The tracks, which are viewed from overhead, consist of straights, tunnels, bridges, oil slicks, dirt piles, U-turns, and right angle turns. Tracks are lined with barriers to keep cars away from the grass, rocks, and trees that act as scenery. Gameplay evokes the arcade classic *Super Sprint* but is more elaborate, as players can enter garages to spend earned money on fuel, repairs, power steering, turbo chargers (increases acceleration), high speed kits (increases maximum speed), retro (makes fast breaking easier), antispin (points your car in the right direction after spinouts), side armor (for bumping into other cars), and front and rear missiles (for shooting other cars). Also unlike *Super Sprint*, this game scrolls to take players down long roadways. Missiles are limited to one per race. Completing a season of nine races advances players to the next difficulty level. While this is an ordinary racer in terms of gameplay and graphics, it's very hard to find, making it highly sought after by collectors.

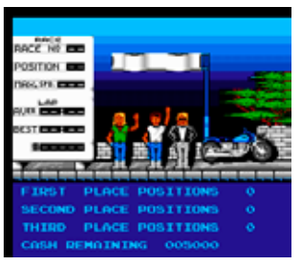
Notable Quotable:

"Driving some of the world's most expensive cars is a nice idea, but unfortunately the NES wasn't able to pull it off, as this racing game shows." —*Video Game Bible, 1985–2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:

"I find more grievances with the name than I do the actual game. What makes a car 'super,' exactly? Is it the number of cylinders, ample horsepower, beautiful design? Most gear heads would think so, but that can't be the case for *Super Cars* . . . None of these cars are super, despite the game's claim . . . one of the worst, most boring titles on the NES . . . Watch out for the music: it's inspired funk, but it might lead you to believe you're having more fun than you actually are. The controls are dodgy until you upgrade the power steering, and even then they take time to sort out." — Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

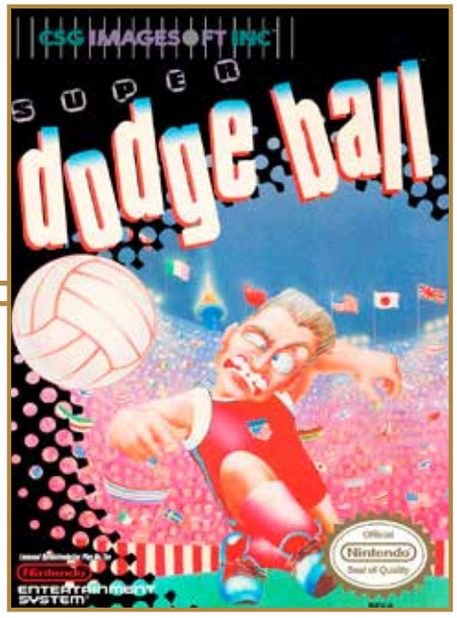




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Super Dodge Ball

PUBLISHER: CSG Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Technōs Japan.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Dodge Ball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.



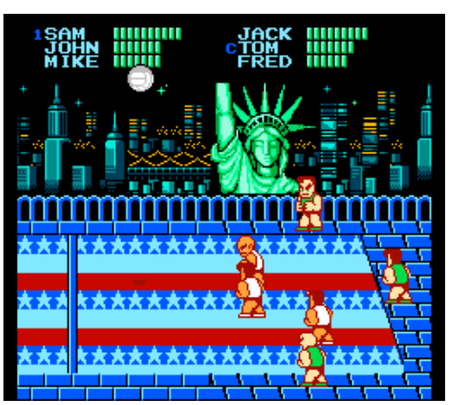
This video game version of the popular sport that traumatized many a school kid pits you as Team USA against eight international squads: Pro All-Stars, India, England, Iceland, China, Japan, Kenya, and the USSR. You can select which of your players, each of whom has distinct offensive and defensive abilities, will be on the inner and outer court. The six-on-six action is viewed from the side and the objective is to throw the ball at the three players on the inner court of the opposing squad to knock them out of the game. You can walk and run, jump over or duck under the ball, catch and throw the ball, and do jumping passes, jumping catches, running throws, and running jump throws. You can also do power shots, which are super throws with special destructive power. Three modes of play are available: World Cup, Versus, and Bean Ball. Varied backgrounds and characters resembling those in *River City Ransom* add to the fun. The original arcade version of *Super Dodge Ball* (Technos, 1987) has smoother graphics and less flickering, but the home rendition remains a distinct, if somewhat sadistic, pleasure.

Notable Quotable:

"I liked *Super Dodge Ball* a lot in the arcades and I like it even more for the Nintendo. It's a fun game that unfortunately is a little easy . . . The graphics and sounds are decent but the gameplay makes up for any shortcomings." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"More than anything else *Super Dodge Ball* captures the sheer fun of smacking an unsuspecting opponent in the face. Particularly brutal hits are exaggerated in their animation and hilarious to watch . . . The field in each country is different and affects the match in different ways. The dirt in Africa makes it harder to run and build up speed, which changes the timing of your special moves. The players in Russia and India tend to catch your throws more often, meaning you'll have to psych them out. It's little factors like these that make the single player mode so much fun . . . thematic music appropriate for each country you visit . . . some of the worst sprite flickering on the NES . . . It may appear simple on the surface but there is plenty of depth." —ClassicGames.Net (www.classic-games.net)

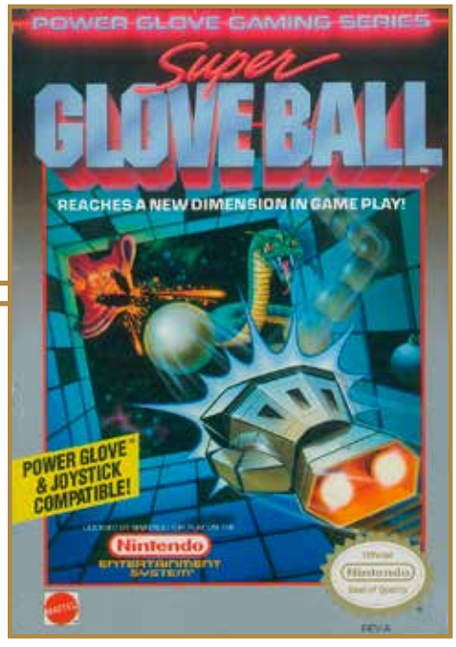


Insider Insight: I remember the first time I laid eyes on the NES version of *Super Dodge Ball*. It was at my friend's house and he was having my brother and I over for his birthday sleepover party. We were sifting through his pile of NES games and the artwork for the game grabbed my attention. We decided to play it, and I noticed that the dodgeball players featured in the game were like the characters from another NES favorite of mine, *River City Ransom*. Like *River City Ransom*, everything about *Super Dodge Ball* screams charm. The characters are all uber cute and each has hilarious reactions that give them larger-than-life personalities. For example, after a tired player takes a hit that knocks him to the ground he'll get back up and pant for a few seconds before returning to the action. Another example is how certain opponents will laugh while holding their bellies after they win a match. The music throughout each stage is also memorable, especially England's stage, which is a mashup of the Beatles' tunes "A Hard Day's Night" and "Get Back." *Super Dodge Ball* has stuck with me throughout the years and I still plug it in my NES from time to time when I'm having a hard time deciding what to play. — Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Super Glove Ball

PUBLISHER: Mattel.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Futuristic/Ball-and-Paddle, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



Essentially a futuristic version of handball with tile-based walls that disappear incrementally, *Super Glove Ball* has players moving a robo glove around a pseudo-3-D room that is viewed from a first-person perspective. The objective is to hit, punch, or catch and throw bouncing energy balls to make them collide with tiles, blocks, tubes, and an assortment of enemies, including rocket bullets, stone sharks, and kamikaze barnacles. Hitting certain items with the ball unleashes robo bullets, bomb balls, ice balls, and other weapons and power-ups, while knocking out an entire wall lets players advance to the next room. Players can immediately proceed through the space where the ball was or continue in the same room to knock out another wall. The game was created specifically with the Power Glove controller in mind and it actually works pretty well with that much-maligned peripheral (using a standard controller is not as much fun), but the novelty does wear thin over time. Plus, holding your arm in the air to play the game for a sufficient amount of time gets tiring. In fact, you might want to rest your arm on some kind of stand while playing the game. Potential weariness aside, this is worth checking out for something a little different.

Memories: Most every retro gamer knows about Mattel's Power Glove, which was made infamous by *The Wizard* (1989), in which the antagonist Lucas (Jackey Vinson) says, "I love the Power Glove. It's so bad." What's great about that line is that it was said without a hint of irony: *The Wizard* was essentially a commercial for the Power Glove and *Super Mario Bros. 3*. The Power Glove is indeed bad in the literal sense of the word, but not when used for *Super Glove Ball*, which put a new slant on such brick busters as *Breakout* and *Arkanoid*. *Super Glove Ball* isn't as fast-paced as those classic titles, and it's definitely a second stringer among Rare-developed titles, but it's an interesting footnote in the long life of the NES.

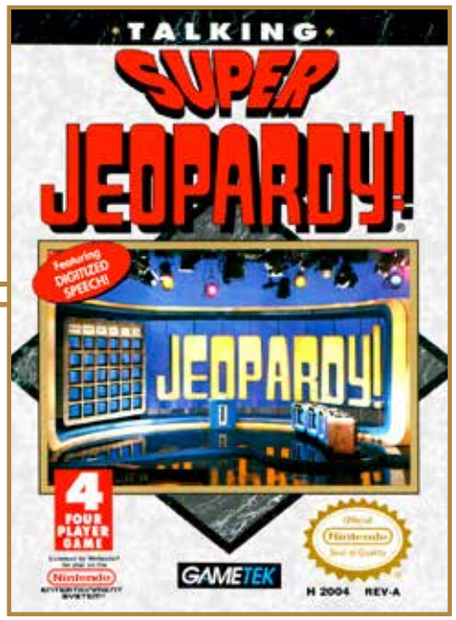
Notable Quotable:
"The Power Glove is surprisingly accurate; your movements are mimicked incredibly well, and actions such as grabbing the ball are more intuitive as you simply close your fist. There's also an exclusive move if you wear the Glove where you can curve the ball by twisting your hand; again, it works perfectly and makes placing your shots a bit easier. However, having to press the face buttons at the same time can be tricky as you need to take your eyes off the screen . . . gameplay is highly repetitive with nothing to break up the action . . . The 3D graphics are excellent . . . the shadows make it easy to know where your glove and ball are . . . an interesting concept, but despite the innovative and well-thought-out control scheme the gameplay falls flat." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:
"With the Power Glove, it is actually quite fun . . . I'd give it a 70 out of 100 . . . It is very reminiscent of the Wii games of today." —The Crow Continuum (YouTube)

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Super Jeopardy!

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering.
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



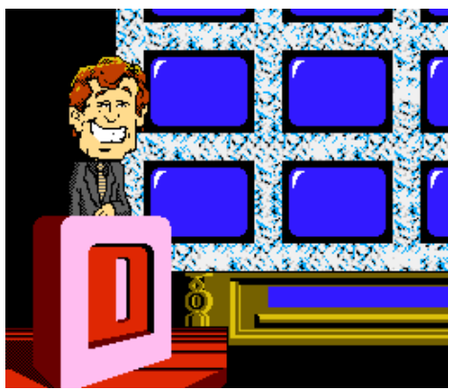
The follow-up to *Jeopardy!*, *Jeopardy! Junior Edition*, and *Jeopardy! 25th Anniversary Edition*, *Super Jeopardy!* features similar gameplay, but ups the NES ante with a variety of new features, including four-player action (with or without multiplayer adapter); digitized voice effects (lots of them, in fact); better graphics; password codes for entering the Final Round; and a grinning game show host (though it's not Alex Trebek). There are almost 2,000 new trivia questions spread among such categories as Geography, Movies, Weapons, Boxing, Rivers and Lakes, TV Trivia, and US History. As in previous editions you must guide a cursor around an alphabet to spell out the answers to questions (actually, as *Jeopardy!* fans know, the questions are posed as answers while the answers take the form of questions). The computer provides the intro to the answers given, such as "who is" and "what is." Includes Daily Doubles, Double Jeopardy!, and Final Jeopardy. While not super rare, *Super Jeopardy!* is harder to find than the three NES *Jeopardy!* games that proceeded it.

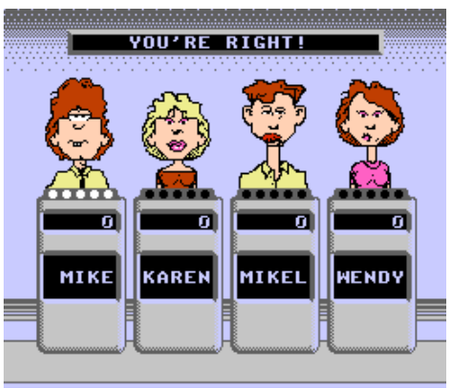
Notable Quotable:

"This is the best *Jeopardy!* game on the NES . . . I used to play this game with my family in the early 1990s and we had fun with it. When [my friends and I] decided to play it in 2014 we had a harder time. The categories were very dated, making some of the questions hard to answer. Even though the game is the fastest paced *Jeopardy!* game on the NES, by today's standards it moves at a snail's pace. Some of the answers we knew but spelled incorrectly, or couldn't spell out the answer before time ran out. We were able to beat the game on our first sitting—it just wasn't a runaway victory like we expected." —Hoz's 8-bit NES Quest (hoz14nes.wordpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"To me, Alex Trebek represents the heart and soul of one of my all-time favorite gameshows. So when a new *Jeopardy!* video game comes along, you kind of assume that Alex will be right there with it . . . instead of Alex we get a David Letterman lookalike who also seems to typify the stereotypical game show host . . . Fortunately, though, *Super Jeopardy!* still maintains the intellectual integrity of the game show with hard questions in categories similar to what you'd see on television. However, it strays from the show's traditional rules, allowing for four players instead of three and involving larger point (not dollar) values for both rounds . . . Meanwhile, the higher point possibilities make final scores more show-like when the game is played by four players instead of three . . . The liberties of the game may offend purists." —Christopher Michael Baker (formerly at allgame.com)

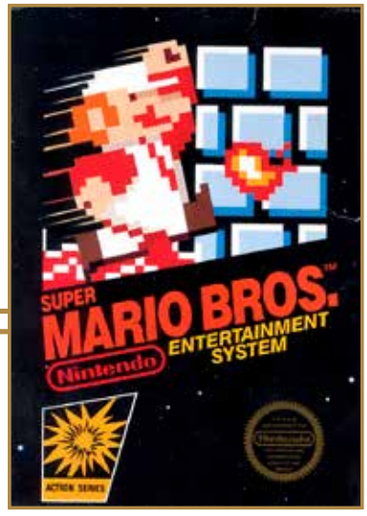




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Super Mario Bros.

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D4.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1985.



Super Mario Bros. did nothing less than invent what we know as the 2-D side-scrolling platformer. Games like *Pitfall!* and *Smurf: Rescue in Gargamel's Castle* preceded it, but those games, great as they are, were mere stepping stones toward the genre. As most of you reading this well know, players control Nintendo mascot Mario as he runs, jumps, swims, and otherwise makes his way through eight cartoonlike worlds of the Mushroom Kingdom. His goal, of course, is to rescue the daughter of the Mushroom King, Princess Toadstool (later known by her original Japanese name, Princess Peach).

The action in *Super Mario Bros.* is remarkably varied, as Mario collects coins, grabs 1up mushrooms for extra lives, hops on enemies to defeat them, shatters bricks by jumping up into them to uncover secrets, goes down pipes to discover hidden areas, kicks turtle shells to knock down enemies, jumps higher via jumping boards, and warps to other worlds. He can also power up into special characters by grabbing one of three different items: magic mushroom (Super Mario, who can duck, shatter bricks, and take a hit from an enemy); fire flower (Fiery Mario, who can throw fireballs and take a hit from an enemy); and Starman (Invincible Mario, who can destroy enemies by simply touching them). In two-player (alternating) mode the second gamer controls Mario's brother, Luigi.

Numerous attributes made *Super Mario Bros.* stand out from all previous games, including gorgeous graphics, unparalleled freedom of movement (the NES d-pad was a nice upgrade over previous controllers), vast side scrolling worlds filled with secrets and surprises, and a colorful assortment of quirky enemies, including the now-iconic Bullet Bill, Little Goomba (a mushroom), Koopa Troopa (a soldier of the Turtle Empire), The Hammer Brothers (twin turtles who throw hammers), Pirana plants, Lakitu (a turtle who controls the clouds), Cheep-Cheep (who swims and can sprout wings and flies), and, of course, Mario's fire-spitting, princess stealing arch nemesis Bowser, who is the King of the Koopa. One of the best, most influential, most iconic video games of all time, *Super Mario Bros.* changed the home console industry forever and helped restore the US market after the Great Video Game Crash of 1983. And it's still a lot of fun to play today!

Memories: You may be surprised to know that I didn't actually play *Super Mario Bros.* until I got my NES for Christmas in 1987. I was 20 years old at the time and was no longer going over to friends' houses to play video games. I was still gaming on my Atari 2600, ColecoVision, Intellivision, and Odyssey2, but my social life consisted primarily of working, dating, shooting hoops, and hanging out with friends in bars, restaurants, and the like. In addition, I never saw the VS. System version of *Super Mario Bros.* in the arcades until later. I had heard of the game, though, and was absolutely floored by it when I first booted it up. I was especially impressed with the cartoonish nature of the game, the secrets and surprises, and the near-perfect controls, at least when compared to what came before.

Notable Quotable:
"*Super Mario Bros.* is the game that all others will be judged by. Its superb combination of challenge, features, graphics, and music makes it a game to be played over and over. There are so many mysteries to uncover and tricks to master that it will keep players coming back for a long time." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"I was playing the amazing *Super Mario Bros.* in a 7-Eleven game room months before the NES was even announced in the US. So when I saw the commercials for the system air with footage from *Super Mario Bros.* I couldn't believe that it looked identical. Little did I know that Nintendo put the NES hardware in the arcade cabinet. Worked like a charm; I got arcade perfection at home!" —Craig Harris (www.ign.com), IGN Nintendo Executive Editor

Notable Quotable:
"To play this game is to get hooked. Simple to understand, it is therefore easy to play; no ploughing through bedsheet-sized instruction leaflets with this one. Nintendo's small-sized controller takes some getting used to but perseverance reaps its own reward, because the graphics and sound are splendid, combining to make a game that is colorful, jolly, and in places pleasantly frustrating as you try to work out the best route round a problem." —*The Games Machine* (December 1987)

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Children would gather at their friend's house after school and play it religiously. Parents would wait for their kids to go to sleep so they could take on the role of the pot-bellied Italian who is still the most recognizable face in video games . . . flawless control . . . Everyone knows that *Super Mario Bros.* is the crown jewel of platform games and Mario is king." —*Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked *Super Mario Bros.* the second-greatest game of all time

Notable Quotable:

"So loaded with surprises and discoveries that it could take months to experience it all . . . sheer delight . . . We had the feeling we had barely touched the surface of this game after playing for hours because each trip through the same region seemed to reveal new secrets . . . belongs in that special hall of fame reserved for truly addictive action games . . . The graphics are cute and comical, the music lively, but it's the great depth of pure action that keeps you playing again and again." —*Computer Entertainer* (June 1986)

Insider Insight: My first real encounter with anything NES related was at a local bowling alley in the form of a *Vs. Super Mario Bros.* machine. My parents would leave me with a handful of quarters to keep me busy while they bowled. I'd do my best week after week, wondering what would come after each subsequent victory on a given level. But it was an event that made me realize I might have a genuine aptitude for games involving a small group of people. I arrived early to play and I put my quarter in, ready to see where my marathon would end. A kid approached and was ready to put his quarter in the machine as well, giving us the two-player option, when another child said, referring to me, "Don't play with him, you'll never get a turn." I remember feeling surprised, but also excited—did this mean that I discovered something I was truly good at? It was then that I realized that I needed to find a way to get the NES at home, so I could play *Super Mario Bros.* the way I did at the arcade. —Jon Sakura, CEO and Owner of retro video game store Gamers Anonymous, Albuquerque, NM

Insider Insight: I worked at Atari until the Great Video Game Crash of 1983. A couple years after that I saw this new system from Nintendo and thought it looked interesting. I knew it already had a good library of potential games that would come over from the Famicom system from Japan. I originally bought the NES, which included *Super Mario Bros.*, for the sole purpose of designing a joystick to replace the included NES gamepad. When I got the system set up and started playing *Super Mario Bros.* with the gamepad I knew right away that the gamepad would be superior to any joystick, and I immediately decided not to pursue the joystick design idea. I got totally hooked on the game. I loved discovering hidden prize blocks to bonk and generate coins or whatever cool bonus items were hidden away.

In the lunch room at Foothill College in Los Altos, California, they had an arcade version of *Super Mario Bros.* I watched someone play it and they found a hidden prize block that I'd never seen before—located early in the first level! I thought, "How could I have missed this on the home version? Maybe it wasn't on the home version." I couldn't wait to get home and see if I could find this prize block in the same location as the arcade version, and sure enough, it was there! I'd been running past it for a long time, not knowing it was there. I remember clearly how cool it was to discover this one hidden block—so awesome! —Steve Woita, video game programmer and designer

Insider Insight: Cliched or not, it was indeed a dark and stormy night. I was watching my sister play *Super Mario Bros.* and she was having the game of her life. When my family finally got an NES my sister and I were in an unspoken race to see who could beat the game first. She spent more time playing at our neighbor's house than I did so she had a considerable head start. I practiced more than her and I was slowly closing the gap, but her lead was insurmountable.

That night I watched as she made it to the final level for the first time. She had done the 99 lives trick at the end of 3-1, meaning it was only a matter of time. I sat there in equal parts awe and rage as she slowly but surely made her way through Bowser's maze-like castle. Finally she came face-to-face with King Koopa himself. She had a fire flower and she wasn't taking any chances. She ran straight for him, took the hit, and made her move to grab the ax and end our race for good. Then suddenly, without warning, everything went black. Mere pixels away from finally having beaten the game the unmistakable sound of thunder filled the room. The power had gone out.

It took everything I had not to crack up hysterically, but I knew that if I were in that position I'd have been devastated, so we just sat there in silence. I don't remember exactly what happened next, but I imagine there were several unsavory words exclaimed at the TV, the NES, and nature itself. But one thing's for sure—she didn't beat me that day. —Kris Randazzo, host of the *Stone Age Gamer* Podcast, writer for *Nintendo Force Magazine*

Insider Insight: I had been playing video games in the arcades for a couple years prior to my first encounter with *Super Mario Bros.* on a PlayChoice-10 machine. For me arcade

games were quick ways to spend quarters on something other than candy and soda. I wasn't very good at video games yet and my feeble attempts would last only a few minutes. Arcade games of the early '80s were notoriously shallow, which didn't make them as appealing to me for extended playing sessions. Your missions were murky and the screens repetitive, but *Super Mario Bros.* was different. You had a clear mission to save the Princess and the scrolling backgrounds while you progressed forward to the right gave you a distinct sense of accomplishment. Each area of a level you uncovered was like slowly working your way through a movie or book. You weren't exactly sure what was going to be revealed, which made the game exciting as well as challenging. The arcade version of *Super Mario Bros.* was great, but it was more difficult than the home port on the NES, as arcade games tend to be.

Super Mario Bros. was the pack-in title when I finally got my NES for Christmas in 1987, a scenario shared by many other gamers of the era. Owning the game meant never again having to put a quarter in the machine, which was infinitely appealing to my childhood piggy bank. The next few weeks included multiple *SMB* marathons and I'm grateful that my parents had two TVs in the house so I could monopolize one of them. *Super Mario Bros.*' many secrets made playing it at home a communal event. My friends and I would gather around the TV, documenting each time we discovered a hidden power-up or pathway. I was always proud of knowing many of the game's secrets before the magazines informed the masses. "Did you read how to get the infinite extra lives in level 3-1?" "Yeah, I discovered that a few months ago—it's still cool, though." Infinitely cool, just like *Super Mario Bros.* will always be for me. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

Insider Insight: Although it occurred almost 35 years ago, I vividly recall the first time I encountered *Super Mario Bros.* Before we had an NES of our very own my brother Kyle and I were at John and Ken's house, along with a couple other neighborhood pals, Ben and Damien. We stood around the TV, utterly transfixed, as Damien declared that he could score more than 37,000 points on the first level and proceeded to do exactly that, end-level fireworks included. Wow, I remember thinking, this looks like an awesome game! A reaction, of course, surely shared in each of our own ways with millions of fellow NES gamers.

Little did I realize that far into the future I would end up re-experiencing a similar moment, quite unexpectedly, and even more meaningfully.

Today I'm an avid retro gamer who still owns the original NES and dozens of games. I even hooked up the system to an old school CRT TV. (Which is more than just nostalgic—certain games translate better to older screens, and the NES Zapper doesn't work with modern TVs at all.) The entire family enjoys it, but while my wife and two older daughters only play on occasion, our youngest daughter Alyssa, who is seven years old as of this writing, especially loves it, with *Super Mario Bros.* being her absolute favorite. It's truly amazing to be able to bond with your children over 1980s Nintendo games!

Fairly recently we hosted a bunch of girls at our house for our middle daughter Hailey's birthday, many of them being Alyssa's friends as well. Midway through the party, in the midst of the kids getting their makeup, hair, and nails done, Alyssa suddenly announced that she wanted to show her friends something else, exclaiming, "Let's play my dad's really old video games!" Moments later five or six kids (and me, having seen them run to the NES) crowded around her as she navigated the first few levels of *Super Mario Bros.*, all to the other kids' attentive amazement. And then, of course, they began arguing over who could play next.

The entire scene truly felt like a time warp to 1986 all over again. Who needs *Stranger Things* on Netflix when you've got the authentic NES and a Mario game all at your fingertips! And that to me, folks, is the hallmark of a genuinely great NES game—one that can even captivate the Tik Tok generation! —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

Insider Insight: During spring 1988 I attended a friend's birthday party, where I first played the NES. Most of the evening we played Nintendo's original *Baseball* and I only got to play *Super Mario Bros.* briefly before having to go home. The game, however, as well as the NES console itself, made a lasting impression on me. Unfortunately my next opportunity to play the system wasn't until summer 1989, after my family had moved cross-country. Some cousins who lived near our new home had one. I was at their house playing *Super Mario Bros.*, *Duck Hunt*, *Bubble Bobble*, and *R.C. Pro Am* every chance I got until that Christmas when I received an NES of my very own.

Christmas 1989 was magical. I don't know how my parents pulled it off, given our less-than-ideal economic situation at the time. We opened presents that morning, no differently than any other year, perfectly content with what was under the tree. We were nearly finished cleaning up the mess of wrapping paper and packaging when my dad opened the TV cabinet a crack, prompting my little brother to scream and dive for the TV, swinging open the cabinet door to reveal an NES already hooked up, the *Super Mario Bros./Duck Hunt* cart already inserted. The NES was my dad's way of apologizing for having to move us halfway across the country.

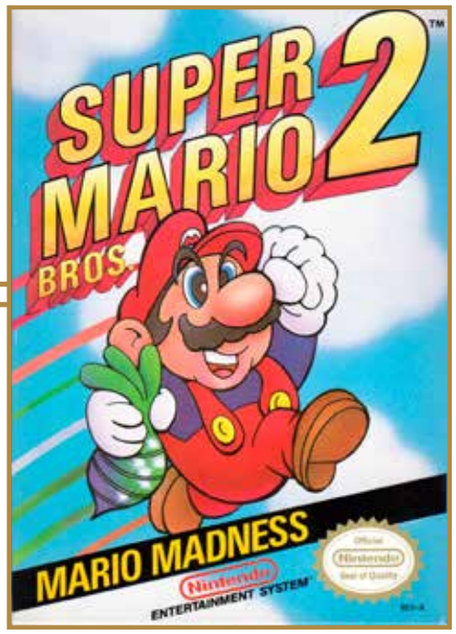
My life changed forever. That machine (which I still have) dominated my childhood, drove my imagination, and set me on a path that I'm still traveling. Playing *Super Mario Bros.* for hours and hours, constantly looking for secrets, practicing new tricks, speed-running before it was a thing—there was always something new to discover. The first time I saw the infamous Minus World! The first time I threw fireballs as small Mario! My first time pulling off the notorious "turtle trick" for 1-Ups! Jumping over a flagpole! The first time I showed the game to my own children! I could easily write an entire book on this game alone.

Even beyond the nostalgia, the game's technical execution is immaculate. The play control is still some of the best ever achieved in a video game, the animation is superb for an NES title (Mario actually has a higher quality run animation in *Super Mario Bros.* than he does in *Super Mario Bros. 3*), and there's a surprising variety of enemies, all with meaningful impact on the gameplay (true story: flying squids are the stuff of nightmares). Even though the game debuted more than three decades ago, it's not hard to see the emerging genius of the game's creator Shigeru Miyamoto (my hero) in *Super Mario Bros.*' design. I doubt anyone back then could have ever imagined just how successful Mario, and Nintendo itself, would become. Mamma mia! —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Super Mario Bros. 2

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D4.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1988.



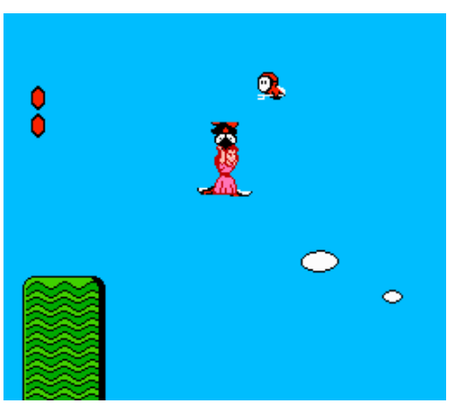
The US sequel to *Super Mario Bros.*, *Super Mario Bros. 2* is basically the same game as *Doki Doki Panic* for the Japanese Famicom Disk System but with some slight alterations, and the Arabian hero theme was dropped in favor of Mario characters. (*Super Mario Bros. 2* in Japan was essentially a more difficult take on *Super Mario Bros.* with some additions, such as wind and poison mushrooms.) In this game players select from Mario, Luigi, Toad, or Princess Toadstool for running, jumping, climbing, and exploring seven vast worlds, battling such oddball creatures as Tweeters (birds), Snifits, Mousers, Bob-Ombs, Trouters (fish), Ninjis, Beezos, Shyguys, Hoopsters, Pokeys (walking cacti), and Phantos. Mario has average jumping power, but he can't jump as high when carrying an item. Luigi jumps far and high, but his power decreases even more than Mario's when carrying an item. Toad has the weakest jumps but is unaffected when carrying an item. Princess Toadstool, my favorite character to control, can float a bit during jumps. They have other variations as well, such as the running speed when carrying an item and how quickly they pick up items.

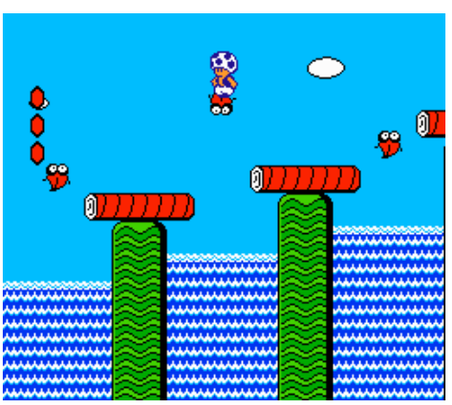
Instead of jumping on enemies like in *Super Mario Bros.*, the primary method of doing battle is to pick up (or pull up) items—including vegetables, bombs, and the enemies themselves—and throw them. Other differences include magic potions for creating doorways to subspaces; keys for opening standard doors; a slot machine bonus game for winning extra lives; the ability to tunnel underground; and mushroom blocks that players can pick up, move, and stand on. The overall objective is to defeat Wart, who has put a curse on Subcon, the land of dreams. Although not as beloved or as famous as its progenitor, *Super Mario Bros. 2* is a classic in its own right.

Memories: While I didn't play the original *Super Mario Bros.* until two years after it came out (I didn't get my NES until 1987), I picked up *Super Mario Bros. 2* right away. I was startled by the major differences in gameplay—it was far from simply offering more of the same—but I quickly grew to enjoy it. This was during my hardcore NES fandom days (I could beat *Contra* without using the Konami Code) and I managed to play *SMB2* all the way through. It was a long, difficult journey, but I loved every minute of it—that ending was especially satisfying.

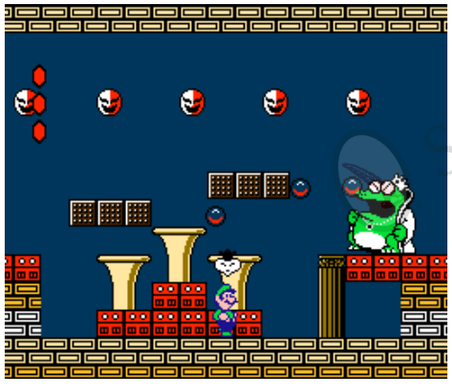
Notable Quotable:
"Like the first game, *Super Mario Bros. 2* promises to provide many, many hours of enjoyment, frustration, delight, and discovery. This one is a worthy sequel and not to be missed." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1988)

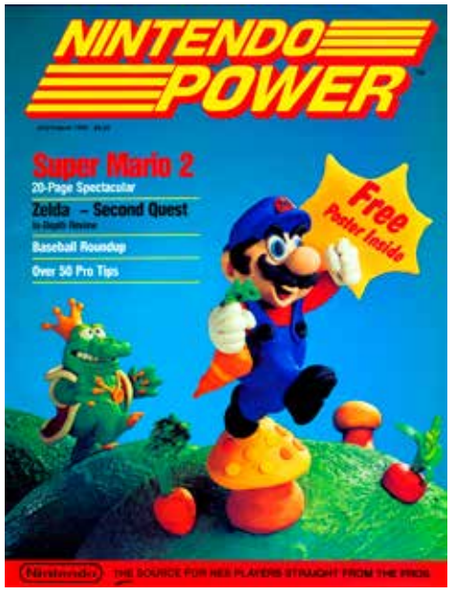
Notable Quotable:
"The sound effects and music are very good and appropriate to the game. The graphics, especially those that are above ground, are uncluttered and, frankly, a bit sparse. There's not much to look at and certainly nothing to make you go, 'Oh, wow!' The detail is much better and usually more interesting below ground . . . an exceptionally challenging game." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)





© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Insider Insight: I didn't get an NES until it was on the market for several years. Often I would go to friends' houses to play, or stop by the electronic section of Sears when I was there with my parents. I remember trying *Kid Icarus* at Lionel PlayWorld and being floored by how incredible it was. My parents were typically a hard sell, but one day after church, my sister and I were in our living room and my dad walked in with this big box. It was the NES Power Set, complete with two controllers, a Zapper gun, and a Power Pad.

He had also grabbed *Super Mario Bros. 2*, which hadn't been out long and was the talk of the playground. Prior to purchasing the console my parents had a meeting, convinced that, like many interests of children, it would be a phase until I moved onto whatever was next. What they didn't realize is that they kickstarted a lifelong obsession of worlds and characters too numerous to quantify that would propel me into owning a video game store decades later. —Jon Sakura, CEO and Owner of retro video game store Gamers Anonymous in Albuquerque, NM

Insider Insight: I was probably the last of my circle of friends to get an NES. Back in 1989 I had done a temporary trade with a friend, giving him my Master System for his NES. After a few weeks enjoying some of the games I'd missed I had the chance to play *Super Mario Bros. 2*, and I instantly fell in love with it. Everything I enjoyed about the first game was still there but it had all been pumped up in a major way. The new graphical style and "uprooting" gameplay was so intriguing to me that I knew the game had to be mine. I asked my dad for a copy for my birthday, making it the first NES game I ever played that was entirely mine. He sent it to me along with *The Legend of Zelda*, so you can imagine my elation.

Many people consider *Super Mario Bros. 2* the black sheep of the series, a distinction that is entirely unfair. It took chances, something later sequels dialed back quite a bit, and it presented a world that I wish Nintendo would take Mario and his friends back to some day. It was the first time players could choose from so many characters, and there was such personality and charm to *Super Mario Bros. 2*'s many worlds and enemies that it has remained one of my of all-time favorite NES titles. My kids play it as well, and the smiles Mario and his pals bring to their faces is all the proof I need that the game is one of Nintendo's brightest 8-bit moments. —Ken Horowitz, administrator of Sega-16.com, author of *Playing at the Next Level: A History of American Sega Games* and *The Sega Arcade Revolution: A History in 62 Games*

Insider Insight: When I was growing up my Uncle Peter on my mom's side of the family came over quite often. He only lived a town away and he seemed to enjoy having a nephew who lived so close. At the time he and his wife Eileen didn't have kids of their own. When the NES began gaining momentum he had bought the console and *Super Mario Bros. 2*. This is when our bond started to form.

On the weekends Uncle Peter would come by, pick me up, and take me to his house so we could have a good time chomping snacks while we played *Super Mario Bros. 2*. We would play it all day—this was a highlight of my childhood because he always wanted to spend time with me. He showed me all the secrets he learned. He was fascinated with Peach's floating ability and claimed she was the best. I would argue and claim Luigi was better because he jumped the highest. We had these kinds of conversations often.

I wasn't very good at the game so he would play the hard levels for me. Most of the time he would get all the way to Wart, which is the last boss of the game, and he would switch it to Luigi so I could battle the final boss and claim that I had beaten the entire game.

Uncle Peter passed away a few years ago. Every time I look at my collection and see that light blue end label with a red printed "Super Mario Bros. 2" written on it I think of him and all the great times we had and how much I miss him. I don't think I've played the game since he passed, but I hope my

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

children will ask me about it someday and want to play so I can relive that part of my childhood.—Raymond Fix, former GameStop associate and blogger of raysbacklogblog.wordpress.com

Insider Insight: We often make seemingly innocuous decisions that end up profoundly affecting us far in the future. These can be recognized only in hindsight, and we all likely have many such instances to marvel over and be thankful for. In my case, perhaps the most significant such episode involves the NES.

Virtually every kid who touched a control pad in the late '80s loved *Super Mario Bros.* In late 1988, as whispers grew that a sequel soon would be headed to stores, anticipation around my neighborhood and at school (I had just started fifth grade) was, to put it mildly, off the charts. And on that first school day after *Super Mario Bros. 2*'s release date, I vividly recall sitting with my friends at lunch when a kid named Jake, who was a grade below me, ran up to our table, unzipped his backpack, and triumphantly pulled out the boxed treasure his parents must have just purchased for him. The facial expressions of everyone at our table revealed a singular shared reaction: You are so lucky!!

Now, Jake and I were not close pals at the time; friendly, yes, but I really only knew him because he was my good friend Mike's first cousin. Indeed, he probably raced to our lunch table simply to ask Mike to play the game together after school. But at that moment, with little hope of soon owning *SMB2* myself (I usually received NES games only on birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions), I knew exactly who I needed to hang out with, and pronto. And sure enough, I ended up playing plenty of Nintendo with Jake going forward.

Notwithstanding this superficial beginning Jake and I quickly became close friends, and remain so to this day. Twelve years after our initial bonding over *SMB2* he and I attended a party where he introduced me to an attractive brunette named Tracey, whom I asked out after five minutes of conversation. She and I went to dinner two nights later and have been together since, marrying in 2003 and becoming parents to three wonderful kids.

I've already of course told him plenty, but thank you again, Jake. And thank you, Mario. My princess was indeed in the right castle.—Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

Insider Insight: *Super Mario Bros. 2* feels so divisive—gamers seem to either love it or hate it. Even for those who love it the game is still the black sheep of *Super Mario Bros.* titles. For gamers and developers who know the whole story behind the game, though, its unique deviations and innovations are what make it a piece of genius that still stands out on its own.

Back in the day Nintendo Co. Ltd. made a direct sequel to the original NES staple *Super Mario Bros.* simply titled *Super Mario Bros. 2* (eventually known as *Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels* outside of Japan). The game was more of a "mod" of the original than an actual new game, though, with new levels and a few new mechanics. When the game was first suggested for western localization initial feedback from Nintendo of America was rather pessimistic, notably regarding the game's difficulty and the fact that graphically it looked virtually identical to the first game. At the same time a strange one-off platformer called *Doki Doki Panic* (a Famicom Disk game originally developed as a licensed title based on a Japanese television show for a promotional event) was noticed internally, and in Nintendo's scramble for a Mario sequel fit for western release the idea to "reskin" it with *Super Mario Bros.* characters and other visual elements picked up momentum.

The game was a huge departure from *Super Mario Bros.*, adding things like free-scrolling levels and new abilities like picking objects up and carrying or throwing them to defeat enemies. Gone were things like time limits and high scores, pipes and bricks, carnivorous mushrooms, and flying turtles. They were replaced with more surreal elements like flying carpets, magic potions, and an overall "dream" theme. When Nintendo of America caught wind of the project the decision to localize the title was a given. *Doki Doki Panic* evolved into *Super Mario Bros. 2* and released outside of Japan in 1988 (and later as *Super Mario Bros. USA* in Japan).

While certainly different, the game accomplished quite a bit in progressing the development of the characters of Mario and his friends and the world(s) they lived in. No longer in the Mushroom Kingdom, Mario and Luigi, along with Princess Toadstool and her mushroom retainer, Toad, were now flung into the Land of Dreams and tasked with defeating the nightmare tyrant Wart, the frog king corrupting the world with his "dream machine." A different world meant new and different places to explore, new enemies to encounter, and several new gameplay mechanics to learn and understand. Mario, and Nintendo for that matter, ended up all the better for it.

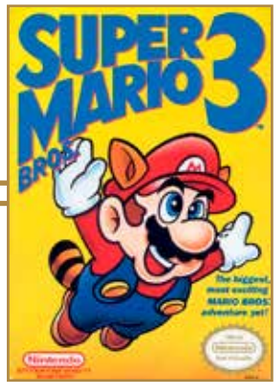
I remember first seeing *Super Mario Bros. 2* on a demo kiosk in a Toys "R" Us shortly after it had first released, and for the next year or so the game was all I could think of—I begged my parents to get it for me for Christmas. I remember constantly drawing pictures of Mario and all the strange new creatures found in his new adventure. These designs were a whole new level of sprite work compared to the original *Super Mario Bros.*, far more visually interesting and iconic looking, burning themselves into my creative subconscious.

I did get the game that next Christmas and I absolutely treasured it. I still do, and it's still my favorite 2D Mario game. It was such a grand experiment, and a very successful one, immensely expanding the creative potential of an established property and setting a precedent for how Nintendo continues to handle its character-driven IPs to this day. *Super Mario Bros. 2* still stands out from other Mario games in general, perhaps mostly due to its unique origin, but that uniqueness, a flagrant defiance of expectation and convention, is exactly what makes this game so beautifully creative and fun to play, and why I still love it so much to this day.—Kale Menges, artist and game developer

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Super Mario Bros. 3

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D4.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



One of the most eagerly anticipated video games ever released, *Super Mario Bros. 3* is also one of the best (and bestselling) games for any console. Unlike *Super Mario Bros. 2*, the basic gameplay is similar to the original *Super Mario Bros.* Bowser's seven children have transformed the kings of the Mushroom Kingdom into animals, and Mario and Luigi must save the day. The running, jumping (over obstacles and on top of enemies), climbing, and swimming action will seem familiar to fans of the first game, but there are many new features, including bonus mini-games (such as a memory match card game); a map screen (which lets you complete levels out of order or skip them); a sliding-down-slopes attack; and an inventory system for multiple power-ups. You can even pick up a turtle shell, run with it, and kick it into enemies and blocks. Best of all, there's a leaf that transforms Mario into Raccoon Mario, which lets him whip around to hit enemies and blocks with his tail, as well as gives him the ability to fly. He can also don a Frog Suit that powers up his swimming ability and a Hammer Bros. Suit that lets him throw hammers. When wearing a Tanooki suit he can turn into a statue.

Returning power-ups include mushrooms (for getting bigger), fire flowers (for throwing fireballs), and stars (for temporary invincibility). New enemies to battle include Para-Goomba, Micro-Goomba, Para-Beetle, Firesnake, Fire Chomp, Chain Chomp, and Lava Lotu, among others. The eight massive lands/kingdoms you'll explore include Grass, Desert, Water, Giant, Sky, Ice, Pipe, and Dark, each varied in theme and rich in design and fun factor. In a two-player game Mario and Luigi work together by alternating turns whenever a player finishes a level or gets killed. Also included in the cartridge is a special version of the 1983 arcade classic *Mario Bros.*, a nonscrolling platformer with two player simultaneous action. Packaged with the NES Challenge Set console after the game had been sold individually for some time, *Super Mario Bros. 3* was featured prominently in the movie *The Wizard* (1989), which was essentially a feature length commercial for the game and for the ill-fated Nintendo Power Glove.

Notable Quotable:

"A true masterpiece . . . My personal favorite of all the Mario games, edging out *Super Mario World* on the SNES . . . It doesn't have the slightly more classic/basic feel of *SMB*, but there are a lot more options and the simple fun is still intact." —Will Matson (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Nintendo has done the impossible. They have created a game as close to perfection as you can get. Take the best from *SMB*, add the changing personalities of *SMB 2*, and beef it up with three meg of power, hundreds of secrets, and hidden items, and you get the best game ever made for the NES!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"You have to see it to believe it, but *Mario 3* is the best thing on any machine outside an arcade since, well, whatever used to be the best thing on any machine outside an arcade. Graphics and sound are superb, but the gameplay manages to defy even my highest words of praise! It's near flawless in its utterly stupendous incredibility and absolutely impossible to put down for anything less than a fire alarm—and even then you find yourself weighing up the odds!" —*Computer and Video Games* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Shigeru Miyamoto and Takashi Tezuka defined the potential of the NES in its early days with *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda*. Fittingly, then, their final statement for the platform established the high water mark for the console. In terms of design, variety, creativity, and sheer polish, nothing on the NES compared to Mario's third and final super 8-bit adventure . . . Practically every single level of *Mario 3* introduced a new element, challenge, or idea for players to come to terms with . . . countless bonuses and hidden secrets . . . it plays perfectly." —Polygon (www.polygon.com), which ranked *Super Mario Bros. 3* the all-time greatest NES game

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Mario Bros. 3* is packed with more secret areas, power-ups, and hidden items than any other game! It's truly a game of exploration. Find a place you can't get too? It usually means that you'll find something neat there . . . The characters and graphics are more cartoon-like than in any of the previous *Mario* sagas, but I like it that way. It's a different and interesting approach to game design. The music and sound effects are strictly top of the line. The drums are unbelievable! Although most of the challenge depends on arcade abilities, the willingness to explore and experiment invariably pays off. The joy of discovering new secrets will make most players stick with this one for a long time." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"While *The Legend of Zelda* and *Super Mario Bros.* are unarguable pinnacles of video game creation, if we were stranded on an island with a power source, an NES, and a single game, it would unquestionably be *Super Mario Bros. 3* . . . Despite the unparalleled hype no one was disappointed. Mario receives some amazing gear in his third game, including the Raccoon Suit that allows him to soar high above the game's carefully crafted levels. Each world in *SMB3* features a unique style and Mario's quest takes him through desert, grasslands, above the clouds, and below the sea—there's so much to explore that we still make discoveries every time we dust off the cartridge today. *Super Mario Bros. 3* does everything an NES game possibly can and pushes the NES to the very limits of its capabilities, and we can unequivocally call it the greatest NES game of all time." —IGN (www.ign.com)

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Insider Insight: As a kid growing up, my first experience and memory seeing *Super Mario Bros. 3* was while watching the movie *The Wizard* during Christmas 1989; I was only eight years old. I was blown away at the gameplay and graphics and thought, "Wow, can gaming graphics get any better than this?" Upon leaving the theater I received a mini *Nintendo Power* magazine called *Pocket Power*, and within that mini magazine was a promotion for *Super Mario Bros. 3*.

A few months later the game hit the US market. To this day it is my favorite video game of all time. The levels are great, and the world overmap and Mario gameplay set the precedent for how every Super Mario platform game would basically be made. I also love that there is a *Mario Bros.* mini-game in it, so it harkens back to where *Mario Bros.* started. I still play *Super Mario Bros. 3* around once per month and it never gets old. —John Lester, "Gamester81" on YouTube, cofounder of Game On Expo

Insider Insight: Looking back after more than thirty years now I have many fond memories of *Super Mario Bros. 3*, but what stands out is how many of those memories aren't of actually playing the game so much as experiencing the cultural phenomenon the game became through the single biggest marketing blitz for a video game up to that time. It wasn't the first television commercial for a video game that I remember seeing, but it's the one from my childhood that has stuck with me the most. All those kids chanting Mario's name, wearing solid color T-shirts, strategically positioned, becoming pixels in a global grid as the camera zooms out and orbits the Earth revealing Mario's smiling face covering the entire North American continent: it made for a surreal, poignant image.

Of course, what is a mere TV commercial compared to an entire feature length product placement ad in the form of *The Wizard*? The movie wasn't exactly Oscar worthy, but it made for an unforgettable way to introduce an American audience to a game that would prove to be infinitely more praiseworthy. Beyond the advertising campaign Nintendo ramped up merchandising for Mario and friends to a whole new level, not the least part of which was the *Super Mario Bros. 3* Happy Meals at McDonald's featuring toys that have become collector's items: the spring-loaded Tanooki Mario and the crawling Koopa Paratroopa are the ones I remember the most. Funny enough, my little brothers and I had the full set before we even played the game!

I don't recall the actual first time I played *Super Mario Bros. 3*, but I do remember when, shortly after its release, my cousin called me on the phone absolutely ecstatic, describing as much of the game as she'd experienced up to that point. After hearing her firsthand account of the game I went to her house as soon as I could. I was absolutely blown away by the level of polish and the sheer amount of content Nintendo was able to engineer into the game. It seemed like there were hidden secrets lurking behind every platform or shrub. There were so many little touches in the game, design nuances that raised the bar higher and pushed the envelope farther than anything ever thought possible with the NES hardware. This included a specialized chipset in the cartridge for enabling effects like diagonal scrolling and animated background tiles (similar technology that would power future NES masterpieces like *Kirby's Adventure*). Further, the Battle Mode was an absolute stroke of genius that seriously upped the ante for the game's multiplayer value and made for an incredible tribute to Nintendo's original *Mario Bros.* arcade title (I'm fairly certain that my brothers and I played more Battle Mode than the main game). It's no wonder that I've come to treasure this game so much as both a gamer and a developer. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

Insider Insight: What more can one say about *Super Mario Bros. 3*, widely considered the finest and most popular NES game ever made? Millions of us owned it, played it a ton, and loved it. Multiple future Mario games were influenced by it, countless strategy guides and articles have been written about it, and classic cartoons (*The Adventures of Super Mario Bros. 3*) and movies (*The Wizard*) became hits by referencing it. Even its deepest secrets (e.g. turning the Hammer Bros. into a coin boat and swimming underneath Bowser's battleship armada) likely have all been revealed. So what unique recollections can I share that won't sound overly familiar?

Well, I can think of two at the moment, and interestingly enough, their off-the-wall originalities derive entirely from my own mischaracterizations of aspects of the game. First, the Ant Pile. What, you might be thinking? Just where in the game is an ant colony? Indeed, there isn't one, but the brown spiral tower to the clouds in World 5 sure reminded me of one (I was only 11 years old after all), so I decided to simply call it that. (And to give credit where it's due, my childhood friend Asher noticed the resemblance first.) Nothing more than a momentary chuckle, it would seem, except that as a teenager I started playing guitar and wrote many of my own songs. And one time I penned a silly tune about the skyward ant pile, imagining it as a genuine afterlife for ants titled "Ant Pile in the Air" and featuring lyrics like: "It doesn't matter how they took the grave/whether stomped upon or maybe sprayed with Raid." (Deep stuff, I know.) Video games tended to spur my imagination, but this one was so over-the-top ridiculous that I definitely got some laughs from performing it for friends a few times.

The other incident, meanwhile, came thanks to Kuribo's Shoe, the green sack into which Mario jumps during a singular level of *SMB 3* that allows him to safely bounce over otherwise harmful piranha plants. Many years after the game's heyday I noticed a foot massaging boot at Brookstone that incidentally looked similar to the fabled sack (it was gray in color, but otherwise uncannily resembled it). A perfect gift, I thought, for my wife Tracey, who was pregnant at the time with our oldest daughter Emma. Even better, I knew she enjoyed *Super Mario 3* growing up and surely would appreciate the twist.

So what of the game did I misunderstand? Tracey certainly loved and appreciated the gift, but didn't remotely recognize the link to *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Indeed, she had never even heard of Kuribo's Shoe, which surprised me given how much she liked the game. But unlike her serious gamer husband enthralled by *SMB 3*'s every last detail and side quest, she, as a more casual player, never took note. Her enjoyment centered on the primary matter at hand—Mario's adventure—which was plenty enough to capture her interest. And with that I gained a valuable insight into *Super Mario 3*'s greatness. We all share the commonality of playing it, of course, but we each attain a singularly unique perspective on the experience. While this holds true on some level for all games, *SMB 3* is so thrilling, vast, varied, and replayable that even as a linear platformer it especially stands out in this regard. Few NES games can captivate players of all interest and skill levels quite so well, and even decades later its ability to do so remains undimmed. —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Super Mario Bros./ Duck Hunt

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/ Light Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1988.

Packaged with the popular NES Action Set, which was the bestselling packaging of the console and included a Zapper gun, this exceedingly common game features two Nintendo Entertainment System favorites in one cartridge: *Super Mario Bros.* and *Duck Hunt*. For many gamers who grew up in the '80s these were the first games they played for the system. For gameplay synopses, see the individual entries for each title; *Duck Hunt* is in *The NES Omnibus: The Nintendo Entertainment System and Its Games, Volume 1 (A–L)*.

Memories: Back in the day I saw stacks and stacks of this super-common combo cart at FuncoLand for less than a buck each. You can still find the cartridge pretty cheaply. If I see a copy for $3 or less I'll typically grab it to sell at a gaming convention. They move pretty briskly at $7 or $8. This may be the most beloved pack-in cart of all time.

Notable Quotable:

"This two-for-one classic started the red plumber's empire and it's the go-to game pack whenever you think 'Nintendo Entertainment System.' The original *Super Mario Bros.* remains one of the most iconic games through its design, music, world building, and more—all done in only eight bits! And it was combined with another game that couldn't have been more different. While it may seem outdated now, *Duck Hunt* was one of the most responsive, at-home light gun shooters compared to competition like *Mad Dog McCree* that didn't work nearly as well. While games are up to ridiculous play times now, *Super Mario Bros.* was infinitely replayable, with tons of different paths, environments, and one clear goal. Together these titles made a stellar package that showed off the capabilities of the NES—and the promise of Nintendo as a whole." — Cameron Sherrill (www.esquire.com)

Insider Insight: All my brother and I wanted for Christmas 1988 was an NES, but we didn't get one. About a week later, after learning a lot of our friends got the system, we started working on our dad about possibly picking one up. We begged and pleaded until he finally relented.

Knowing that it would be next to impossible to find an NES for sale a week after Christmas my dad promised us that, if we could find one ourselves, he would buy us the system that night. That was all we needed to hear. We spent the next two hours on the phone, calling every store we could think of within an hour's drive. We finally found a place with a single unit in the next town over.

To my dad's credit he was true to his word. We climbed into his old Delta 88—in a snowstorm, no less—and headed out to pick up the console. By the end of that night my brother and I were playing *Super Mario Bros.* and *Duck Hunt* on the family television. That moment is when I fell in love with video games. —Greg Sewart, podcaster, developer, former Previews and Reviews Editor for *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

Insider Insight: One of my earliest memories is of playing *Super Mario Bros.* in the basement with my father when I was just two years old. It was a hard game, as many NES games were at the time, so we were at it a lot. Those times are some of the happiest memories I have of bonding with my dad in my younger years, but he wasn't particularly good at the game and obviously, neither was I.

But this was just the beginning. When we got bored we would play other games like *Super Mario Bros. 2* and *Super Mario Bros. 3*. I'd also play *Duck Hunt* and *Tetris*. The Zapper light gun was so big I could barely hold it up and I'd cheat by standing point blank at the screen. I remember Dad would laugh and try to tell me that's not how you're supposed to play, but I couldn't hit anything otherwise.

Years passed and I progressively got better and better at video games, but as time moved on Dad became less interested in the hobby. After a few years I overtook him in skill, and I would spend much of my time playing games alone in the basement. And even though his interest in gaming had waned, I'd always look forward to showing him and others how far I could get before I reached a game over. It was this drive to impress my father that would eventually lead to a lifelong passion for games, and it all started with the *Super Mario Bros./Duck Hunt* combo cartridge. —Anthony L Restivo, Host of Retro Roulette and Tournament of Voices

SOMEERPUBLISHING

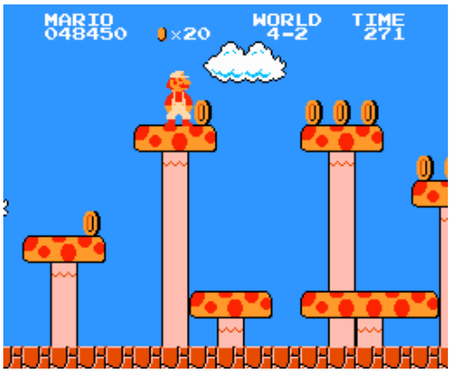
Super Mario Bros./Duck Hunt/World Class Track Meet

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo/TRY.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Light Gun Shooter/Sports/Track & Field, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

Packaged with the NES Power Set, which also included the Power Pad and the Zapper light gun, this cartridge features three NES favorites in one: *Super Mario Bros.*, *Duck Hunt*, and *World Class Track Meet*, the last of which is the rerelease of Bandai's *Stadium Events*. For gameplay synopses, see the individual entries for each title; *Duck Hunt* is in *The NES Omnibus: The Nintendo Entertainment System and Its Games, Volume 1 (A–L)*.

Memories: It's impressive that they squeezed three quality games into one cartridge. It's a terrific value as well. And such variety—platforming, target shooting, and running! I didn't own the Power Pad back in the day (I played *World Class Track Meet* at a family friend's house where I babysat their kids), but of course *Duck Hunt* and *Super Mario Bros.* were key components of my NES collection.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Insider Insight: The first time I ever played an NES was at my neighbor's house. He had the setup with *Super Mario Bros.* and *Duck Hunt*, and once I saw it, my Atari 2600 never looked quite the same. I begged and pleaded with my parents to get an NES of our very own, but nothing could have prepared me for what they brought home: The NES Power Set. The Power Pad was, and still is, such an amazing sight to behold, and having not just the games I played at my neighbor's house but *World Class Track Meet* as well was unbelievable. But for all the fun we had with it, the thing that always sticks in my mind about this cart in particular is the sound it makes when you're selecting which game to play. There's this random fluctuation in the game selection sound effect that inexplicably enthralled me as a kid, and it sure didn't hurt to see these giant game logos scrolling by with every button press. Even now, every time I want to play *Super Mario Bros.* on my NES I always go with this triple pack and flip through the menu for a minute or two. Is that weird? —Kris Randazzo, host of the *Stone Age Gamer* podcast, writer for *Nintendo Force Magazine*

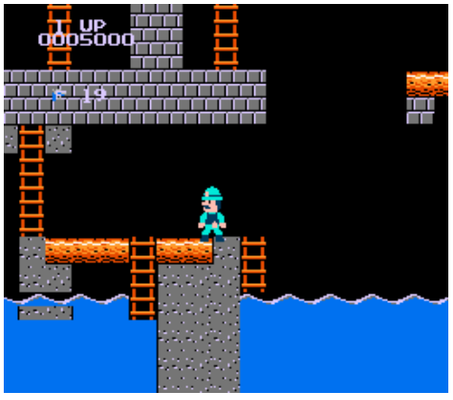
Super Pitfall

PUBLISHER: Activision.
DEVELOPER: Pony Canyon/Micronics.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.

Pitfall Harry returns to rescue his niece, Rhonda, and his faithful sidekick, Quickclaw the Lion. He must also recover the Raj diamond in this open platforming adventure. Through the game's 270 scrolling screens Harry runs, jumps, swims, climbs ladders, and swings like a diseased Luigi. Harry shoots at enemies such as frogs, vultures, snakes, bats, and cavemen. He can't shoot while kneeling, which is a pain, since enemies often approach low to the ground. Harry starts with only 20 bullets but can find spare guns for more. There are numerous items to locate, including coded crystals for unlocking doors, but they remain invisible until you jump a certain way near them, meaning you must hop around like a jackass virtually the entire game to make sure you don't miss any crucial collectibles. The only items to grab that you can see are stacks of flashing gold bricks that give you extra points. Thanks to clumsy controls, cheap hits, terrible music, ugly graphics, generic level design, and blind drops (including down the first ladder in the game, where you'll be killed by a creature), this is an awful game and a waste of a fantastic franchise that began back in 1982 with *Pitfall!* for the Atari 2600.

Memories: Like many retro gamers, I have a lot of appreciation for and really enjoy the original *Pitfall!* for the Atari 2600. I spent a lot of time with the ColecoVision version as well. Even though I never beat it (or *Pitfall II*, for that matter), I value it as a groundbreaking and legendary game, so it was hugely disappointing when this turkey of a sequel dropped on the NES. I can't imagine anyone who could like this egregious stain on the franchise.

Notable Quotable:
"Probably the grossest misuse of the word 'Super' in the history of the English language . . . barely qualifies as a game . . . If you accidentally put the game into your NES just turn off the power, remove the cartridge, and smash *Super Pitfall* with a hammer." —Seanbaby (www.cracked.com), who ranked *Super Pitfall* the 18th-worst NES game



Insider Insight: I was a devoted Atari fan in the late '80s and the guys at school mocked me for hanging onto those antiquated relics from childhood. No one played Atari games anymore, and no one wanted any Atari stuff except for weirdos like me. The NES was the hot new thing, and the guys couldn't stop talking about the great games and incredible graphics. I sneered at that. Graphics didn't make the game, after all, and I was perfectly content playing my favorite Atari classics. Let them have their Nintendos—I didn't need one.

All that got thrown out the window once I actually played the NES. The games weren't just good looking, they were fun to play, and I was hooked. But as great as these new games were, I wanted a reassurance that something from the age of Atari was going to continue. One day, while standing in line at the local Kay Bee Toys, I saw the reassurance that I needed hanging in the case behind the register. I couldn't believe my eyes. There was a *Pitfall* game. For Nintendo.

I loved the two *Pitfall* games on the Atari 2600. And this one . . . this one was SUPER! It said so right on the box, in big bold letters: SUPER PITFALL. I knew right then I had to get an NES just so I could play this game—and eventually, once I finally got my own NES, I did.

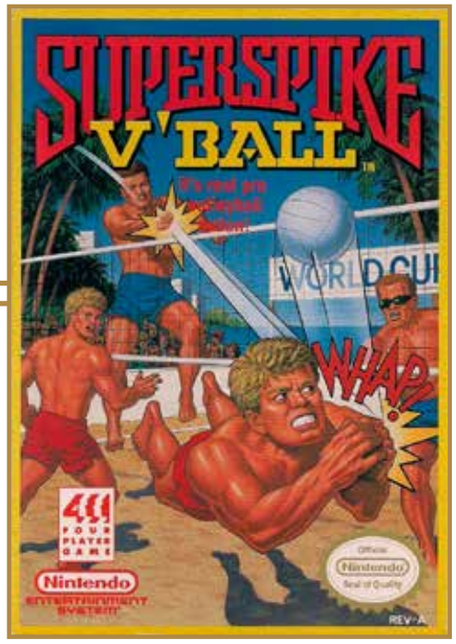
To say I was disappointed would be a major understatement. *Super Pitfall* was a joke, a loose adaptation of my beloved *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns*, but made significantly worse. The game was loaded with bugs, the graphics had been drawn in an exaggerated cartoon style, the controls were terrible, the music was horrible, there was no real clue as to where to go or what to do . . . it was a disaster.

But somehow it has never permanently left my collection. Somehow it always comes back to me, and over time I've developed a strange sort of nostalgia for it. Weird how that works out, isn't it? —Rob Strangman, author of *Memoirs of a Virtual Caveman* and coauthor of *Hardcore Gaming 101 Digest Vol. 3: The Guide to Retro Horror*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Super Spike V'Ball

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Technōs Japan.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Volleyball, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

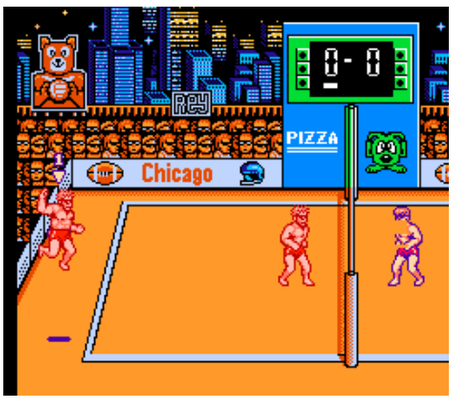


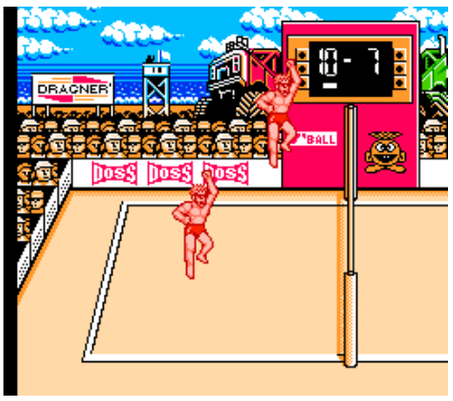
Super Spike V'Ball is based on the 1988 Technos arcade game, which was released under the titles *V'Ball* and *U.S. Championship V'Ball*. It is a two-on-two volleyball game that fans of *Kings of the Beach* should enjoy. Up to four players select from four different muscle-bound teams, including George and Murphy, Al and John, Ed and Michael, and, most notably, Billy and Jimmy of *Double Dragon* fame. Each team varies according to such attributes as speed, defensive technique, and spiking power. An X on the ground indicates where the ball will land, and players automatically dive for balls that are just out of reach. To do a super spike, gamers must press the B button three times while the player is in the air. The elevated view is from the side, and the screens scrolls a bit to the right and left to follow the action. Naturally the arcade game has richer, more distinguishable graphics (each team in the NES game looks like twins), but this is a nice coin-op conversion nevertheless.

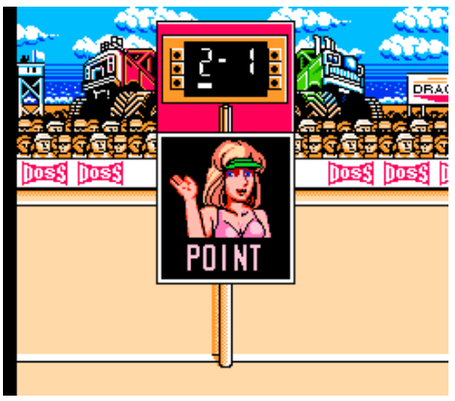
Memories: When I was in high school I played on the church volleyball team, which was composed of members of our church, plus a few of our youth minister's friends who were especially skilled at the sport. We were a good team and actually made it to the championship game. Unfortunately the opposing team scored the final/winning point with a shot aimed directly at me. I misjudged it, thinking the player behind me would get it, so I ducked and my teammate in question had to dive for the ball, and it went out of bounds. Game over. We lost, and our youth minister was a poor sport and got legitimately angry, screaming and yelling right in my face. I was mortified. Luckily nothing so traumatic ever happened to me with video volleyball.

Notable Quotable:
"Has enough options to keep every hardened beach bum happy . . . undoubtedly one of the more playable volleyball games around—far easier to control than *Beach Volleyball* . . . creates quite an atmosphere if you can find three friends to cram around the TV." —*Raze* (October 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"A very simple game to get into but it takes quite a while to fully master the control method . . . It reminds me of *Blades of Steel* in that the game itself is very simple, but there are loads of options plastered on top of the game to make it that much longer. The idea of having four different teams to choose from is a good one and helps suit your style of play. The graphics are fine, although the backdrops don't significantly change between each level. The sprites are large and well-animated, and the sound consists of a few decent tunes and some nice sound effects (the crowd noise is pretty good)." —*Mean Machines* (June 1991)



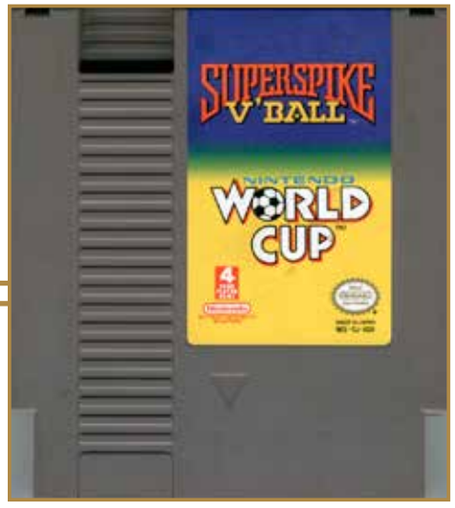


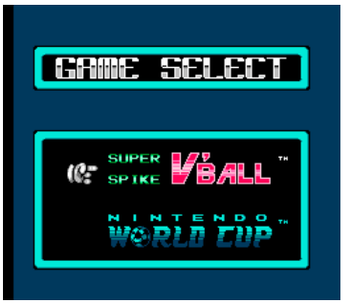


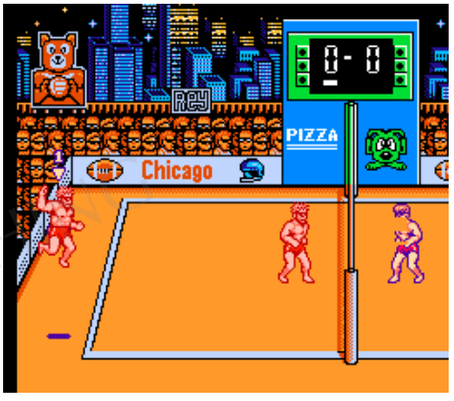
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

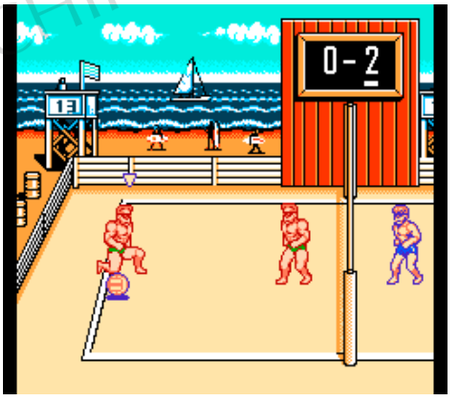
Super Spike V'Ball/ Nintendo World Cup

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Technōs Japan.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Volleyball/ Soccer, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.









Super Spike V'Ball/Nintendo World Cup was the pack-in cartridge with the Nintendo Entertainment Sports Set, which also included the NES Satellite four-player adapter and four controllers. For gameplay synopses of each title see their individual entries in this book.

Memories: A complete-in-box Sports Set is hard to find these days, as it was one of the lesser distributed packaging styles for the console, but it's definitely a nice pickup for anyone with enough spare cash lying around to get one. And back in the day, if you were the only kid on your block with four-player capabilities on your NES, you were probably pretty popular! Unless you were a jerk or smelled bad or something.

Notable Quotable:
"Wow, both of these games are fantastic . . . *Nintendo World Cup* is a wonderful representation of the world's favorite sport on a technically limited platform . . . Each game is a joy in multiplayer." —My Brain on Games (mybrainongames.com)

Super Sprint

Publisher: Tengen.
Developer: Tengen.
Game type: Formula-1 / Indy Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1989.

A fun but simple racer that fans of old school gaming will appreciate, *Super Sprint* for the NES does a solid job covering the basics of Atari's 1986 arcade game. Players race their small car around seven twisting, turning, nonscrolling, top-down tracks (five laps around each track) dodging oil slicks, tornadoes, water puddles, and mud puddles while trying to defeat three other cars. There are over/underpasses and hairpin turns as well. Two new obstacles—exploding cones and hydraulic poles—have been introduced. By collecting wrenches and winning races you can upgrade your car with super traction, turbo acceleration, and higher top speed. You earn points by crossing checkpoints, winning races, and collecting bonus flags. The NES control pad works fine in steering the cars, but the game is missing certain elements found in the coin-op classic, including a three-player mode, selectable tracks, and helicopter flyovers. In addition the Winner's Circle screen has been simplified, the graphics are less detailed (there are fewer trees and no spectators, for example), and the coin-op game did benefit from a steering wheel and gas pedal controls. Two-player action recommended as the computer-controlled cars are easy to beat. Unlicensed, but a pretty common game.

Memories: The first coin-op video games I recall playing are *Pong* and Midway's *Gun Fight*, both in a bowling alley in 1975. I distinctly remember playing *Sprint 2*, the first game in the *Sprint* series, in an arcade the next year, when it was new. It was the follow up to *Gran Trak 10* and *Gran Trak 20*, which I do not recall seeing. I was fascinated by *Sprint 2*'s steering wheel and gas pedal controls, and its two-player racing action. It was the first car racing arcade game that featured computer-controlled opposing drivers and it was a nice upgrade from the electromechanical driving games I had played previously. *Sprint 1* followed in 1978. The "1" and "2" in the game titles indicate the number of players, not that *Sprint 1* was a prequel.

Notable Quotable:
"A good game for one player, but lots of fun for two. The only drawback is the lack of variety in the courses. The animation of the cars is good." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games III* (St. Martin's Press, 1990)

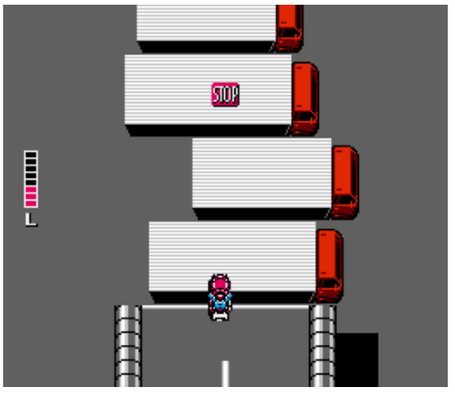
Notable Quotable:
"Extremely enjoyable . . . couldn't fail to impress because of three reasons: its speed, the competitive edge which leads to some serious late night joypad bashing, and the opportunity for some mindless brutality." — *Raze* (January 1991)

Insider Insight: I never played *Super Sprint* growing up. It was much later in life when I became part of the game developer Black Lantern Studios that I would finally play it. Black Lantern was founded in 2004 and had only completed some smaller PC titles at the time. As a strategy for developing our team and our talent we started porting classic titles to new platforms. In the case of *Super Sprint*, we were offered the chance to port the arcade version to the GameBoy Advance. Since I'd not played the game growing up I needed to get up to speed pretty quickly, and the NES version was a great option. I was impressed by what I found—*Super Sprint*'s game mechanics hold up well after all these years. I also found the non-traditional cartridge mold Tengen used for their games interesting. In 2005, our GBA port of *Super Sprint* shipped as part of a combo cartridge with *Spy Hunter*, another port of a classic arcade racer. —Matt Raithel, Studio Director, Graphite Lab; Professor of Practice of Game Design, Maryville University

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Super Spy Hunter

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft.
DEVELOPER: Tokai Engineering.
GAME TYPE: Demolition/ Combat Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

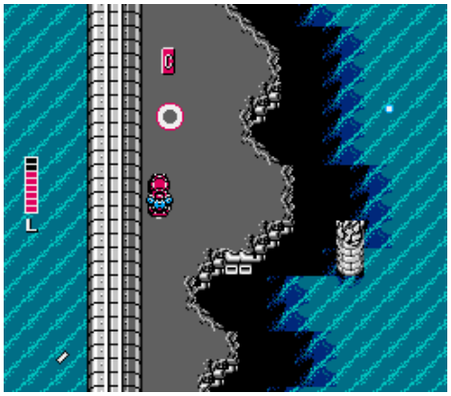


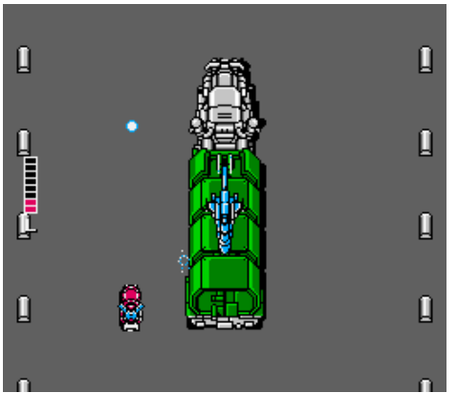
A console sequel to *Spy Hunter*, which was an arcade favorite that I never could seem to play very well, *Super Spy Hunter* is an NES exclusive, and a highly enjoyable one at that (even though I'm not very good at it, either). As in the original *Spy Hunter* the game is viewed from overhead, with players racing up the screen, shooting and avoiding other cars. However, the player's car is now futuristic in nature and shoots three-way spread fire and can jump ramps. Instead of entering vans to procure additional weaponry players must destroy weapons vehicles to augment their firepower. New weapons include rapid fire, a computer (for aiming), a tire slasher, super bombs, and an autonomous cannon, among others. This time there are actual bosses, including an armored transport, a magnetic destroyer, and a super turret terminator. There are levels as well, including Aquapolis, Desert of Doom, Hazardous Detour, Collapsible Canyon, Amphibious/ Aerial Assault, and Weapons Factory. Once again gamers will occasionally drive a boat, but *Super Spy Hunter* also features an airplane to pilot. Unfortunately the *Super Spy Hunter* cartridge is harder to find than the regular *Spy Hunter* game.

Notable Quotable:
"What action fan hasn't wanted to be a spy involved in international espionage? That's part of what makes *Super Spy Hunter*, well, super. That and the great graphics, huge bosses, and fancy power-ups." —*GamePro* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"*Spy Hunter* is a classic arcade game, and the NES sequel is just as cool. The gameplay is great, and there are a ton of good power-ups. Graphics are good, if a little bit washed out . . . Exceptional control and just a great game overall." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Takes everything that made the original famous and does it better . . . a decent assortment of weapons this time . . . level design in *Super Spy Hunter* is what truly makes it great . . . varies the terrain . . . drive through quicksand . . . race across broken highways . . . roads bend and curve in a way that is technically impressive for the system . . . stages run far too long . . . moves at a blistering pace and features little slowdown . . . some of the worst flickering on the system, although it doesn't affect gameplay that much . . . great soundtrack . . . an awesome hidden gem in the NES library." — ClassicGames.net (www.classic-games.net)

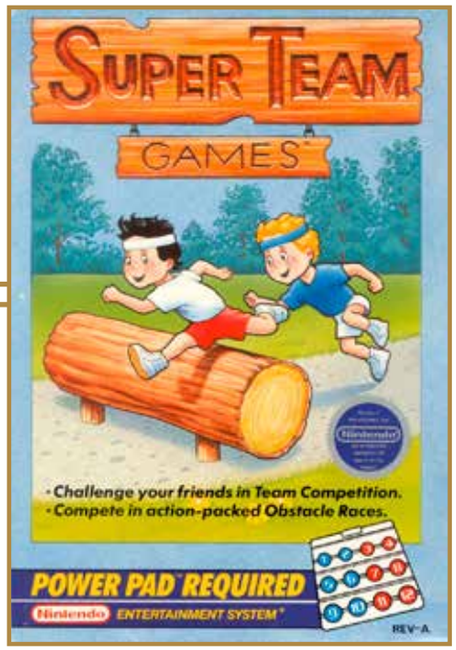


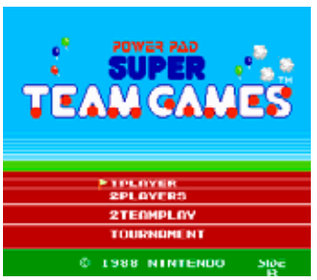


©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Super Team Games

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Sonata.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Exercise, 1–6 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.





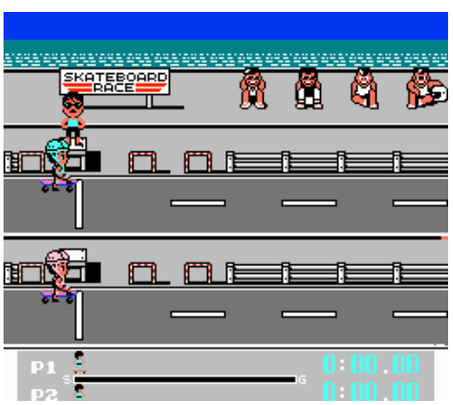
Super Team Games lets players compete in eight competitions: Log Hop (run, jump over logs), Belly Bump Ball (keep bumping the ball till it crosses the finish line), Water Cross (run, jump over water, keep running if you land in water), Crab Walk (walk like a crab, sidestep your way around the track), Wall Jump (run, jump over high walls), Bubble Run (run while encircled in a bubble), Skateboard Race (jump or slalom to avoid obstacles), 6 Legged Race (three players move in unison), Tug of War (drag your opponents into your area), and Relay Race. To get the onscreen competitors to perform such actions as run, jump over obstacles, bump a ball, ride a skateboard, and pull a rope, players must run, jump, step, and place their hands on the large round spots on Nintendo's Power Pad control mat, which gets awfully crowded when six gamers are playing at once. The split screen action is side-scrolling and the contestants are short-legged boys wearing bands over their big heads. The game definitely gives you a good aerobic workout. The manual recommends that you warm up with a few light stretching and jumping exercises before playing (good advice, for sure) and that you tape down the Power Pad at the four corners if it moves too much during play. It also warns that "excessive exercise is harmful" and that you should "limit your gameplay to 1 hour a day."

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Team Games* is a significant step up in difficulty from *World Class Track Meet* . . . requires more consistency and better form . . . a competent title. The graphics are simple and clean. The music, while not notable, is decent. The controls work well once you learn how to navigate the menu. There is a wide variety of events . . . The real fun of *Super Team Games* lies in playing the game with someone else. Racing against another player or coordinating large groups for team events are the kind of activities that form memories and build bonds, even in the heat of strenuous competition . . . a good exercise tool for Power Pad owners." —Take on the NES Library (takeontheneslibrary.com)

Notable Quotable:

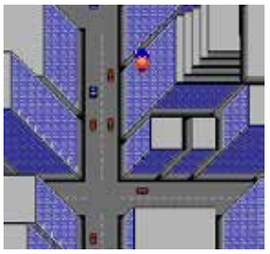
"Imagine my surprise when I couldn't make it through one pathetic obstacle course of *Super Team Games* without sucking down large amounts of oxygen and water . . . Crab Walk contorts your body so your hands and feet are on opposite ends of the pad. It's a nice change of pace . . . The summer camp atmosphere in *Super Team Games* is endearing, but my inability to complete the courses without feeling like an overweight chain smoker doesn't make me want to revisit them . . . I applaud *Super Team* for challenging us Americans—both children and adults who act like children—to better ourselves through brief, strenuous bouts of exercise." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Superman

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Kemco.
GAME TYPE: Adventure/ Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1988.



Superman has the reputation of being a lousy property when it comes to video games, and this cartridge is one reason why. The game fails miserably in all reviewable categories, as though it were trying purposefully to soil the Man of Steel's storied heritage. As Superman, your job is to stop crime in Metropolis, culminating in boss battles against Lex Luthor, Ursa, Non, and General Zod. Superman can jump, punch (robots, racketeers, fire beasts, zombies, and other baddies), and execute a variety of his far-famed (if watered-down here) powers: x-ray vision (to see enemies hiding behind buildings), super spin (drill yourself into the ground), heat vision (fire at enemies, especially bosses), super breath (extinguish fires, freeze enemies), and super flight (jump very high, fly quickly and far). Each power is selectable from an inventory screen. Flight is used for travelling the map of Metropolis so you can go to different locations to complete those missions. You begin as Clark Kent, who can also jump (very high for some reason) and punch, but if your power meter is high enough you can enter a phone booth to transform into your more powerful alter ego. You can also ride the subway and talk to people to get clues on where to go next, but those "clues" aren't helpful. Power stones make Superman more powerful while similar looking Kryptonite reduces his powers. Egregious flaws abound, from boring flight sequences, to punches that connect when Superman's fist is a good inch away from the enemy, to the short, squatty, clumsily animated characters.

Memories: First appearing in *Action Comics* #1 (1938), Superman has fought for truth, justice, and the American way in virtually every known form of media in every corner of the globe. His image has been featured on thousands of consumer products, such as lunch boxes, action figures, puzzles, posters, Underoos, and even peanut butter. Of all the Superman video games ever produced this one is easily one of the worst, right up there with *Superman 64* for the Nintendo 64. Some might say it's ambitious, considering its mapping system and nonlinear gameplay, but sadly the best thing about the game is the box it comes in. Rabid Superman collectors, intent on getting everything featuring the Man of Steel, will want to add a complete copy to their collection. NES completists will want the game as well. All others need not apply.

Notable Quotable:
"Lousy music . . . It's really annoying that there isn't any way to cancel these dialogue boxes or speed them up. And why is everyone wearing green? Is it Saint Patrick's Day or something? Why are the telephones as big as the desks? . . . Who wants to play as Clark Kent, anyway? . . . I never heard of a game where 'down' goes through the door . . . the most pathetic excuse for Superman I've ever seen. On the title screen he looks okay, but why in the game does he look like this? . . . the control is so awkward . . . This game is just so awful." —The Angry Video Game Nerd (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"Fans of *Super Mario Bros.* will enjoy this cartoonish version of the legend with its hop-and-bop'em gameplay. Also there's a good deal of challenge in questioning passersby, searching for villains, and traveling to and from different locations in Metropolis. But fans of Superman and/or hard edge adventure games will be disappointed—the game makers would have been wiser to make this a more realistic seek-and-destroy cartridge . . . Excellent musical score." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"One of the most boring games on the console . . . jumping is slow and floaty, and makes you feel like you're jumping without gravity working against you. And the attack, well, I think it's supposed to be a punch, but the animation doesn't look any different from Clark Kent/Superman's walk cycle so it's more of a nondescript lunge. What's really weird is that if you keep punching while in the air you'll just stay in place . . . You can hit enemies without being particularly close to them, which makes the whole attack feel like a half-assed implementation . . . Flight only works in particular areas, but there's no visual indication as to where you can use it. If it works you may fly to a different part of the map, or to the top of a building to fight more enemies. If it doesn't work you still have to watch Superman fly upward and then come back down, even though nothing comes of it. So you're usually just wasting the flight power watching the same piece of animation over and over . . . There's no fluidity to the controls and the gameplay is never engaging . . . there's not a single NPC in the game that says anything even remotely helpful . . . probably one of the worst looking games on the NES . . . ghastly, irritating soundtrack (the game never even bothers making a synthesized attempt at John Williams' *Superman* theme)." —Wizard Dojo (wizard-dojo.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Swamp Thing

PUBLISHER: THQ Software.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Based on the short-lived animated series from 1991 that starred the DC Comics character created by Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson, *Swamp Thing* pits the valiant piece of vegetation against arch foe Arcane and his underhanded Un-Men, bosses Weed Killer, Skin Man, and Dr. Deemo (who attacks with poisonous fangs and wicked spells). Unfortunately the nuance, horror, and sophisticated storytelling found in the comics and the cheeky fun of the cartoon have been reduced to a poor platformer. As Swampy you trudge through eight dark, dreary levels—Swamp, Skull Village, Graveyard, Chemical Factory, Dark Forest, Junkyard, Toxic Dump, and Arcane's Lab—jumping over, punching, or throwing moss balls at robots, snakes, skeletons, knives, and other enemies and obstacles. You can grab helpful items, including swamp beakers (energy restoration), 1-ups (extra lives), batteries (20 for extra energy, 50 for an extra life), and swamp moss (10 moss balls). Pressing up on the d-pad transforms Swamp Thing into a tree, apple, tire, or flower to access places and weapons he can't ordinarily reach. Swamp Thing can't crouch and punch simultaneously, causing some frustration against enemies that are lower to the ground. The game, which is framed by a number of cutscenes, is playable, but murky visuals, slimy controls, and gameplay mired in mediocrity mar this messy monster mash.

Memories: I collect superhero games, and I really like having complete copies, but execrable NES titles like *Superman*, *X-Men*, *Wolverine*, and *Swamp Thing* make me wonder why. It's got to be the box art. The games look great on my shelf but not on my TV screen.

Notable Quotable:

"Why release an 8-bit cart that offers nothing in terms of gameplay, graphics, or originality? Licensing, of course! Not even the Swamp Thing can save this poor example of 8-bit technology. Fans of the movie will be very disappointed, as will anybody who buys this cart." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The Swamp Thing I know is seven feet tall and weighs about 400 pounds, an intimidating mountain of a Thing, with lots of supernatural powers to supplement his superhuman strength . . . The Swamp Thing I know can regenerate, read minds, create illusions, induce growth in and control plants, influence the weather, and on a really good day even alter time itself. Hardly the kind of guy that's worrying about carefully timing a leap over a floating tin can . . . I'll take the swamps of *Bayou Billy* any day over this one . . . gameplay is severely lacking . . . his punch is useless without gathering the swamp powered projectiles that are in themselves difficult to obtain. So he spends the game leaping out of the way of enemies that you or I—creatures without the ability to bend bars or communicate with plants—would find rather pedestrian." —Joe Santulli (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight: My Swamp Thing with the retractable hand was quite possibly the coolest action figure of all time. I enjoyed making him hold things like straws and pretzels and then have him pull them toward me. While using Swampy actually took much longer and I broke a lot of snacks in the process, I thought of it as my favorite mutated vegetation monster lending a helping hand. My best friend discovered that the cord for the NES controller fit between Swampy's solid plastic fingers and she would squeeze his green legs together to reel it in with his super swamp grip and say in her best Swamp Thing voice, "Plaaaay wiiiiith meeee."

I took that little guy everywhere, including the tiny shop uptown where I bought my baseball cards, comic books, and Pogs. John's Card Shop wasn't much bigger than a closet, but on a summer day, with an extra-large Slush Puppie, I could spend hours in there searching for treasure. Swamp Thing was peeking out of my messenger bag while my friend and I dug through bins of comics, searching for anything with Venom on the cover. The guy working the shop may have been irritated by our fruitless attempts to slurp up the last of our frozen cherry coke when he said, "I got a Swamp Thing comic, ya know."

He proceeded behind the counter and pulled the issue from some magical secret storage. Then he narrowed his eyes at me and pointed to Swampy. He had a New York accent that sounded especially foreign in our small, coal-cracker town. "You got Nintendo?" Then he slid the NES *Swamp Thing*—brand new in the box—next to the comic. I wish this was the story of how I got the game, and my best friend and I sat with Swampy between us playing it until we defeated the weird pistachio thing and restored peace to the swamp. Unfortunately we had spent most of our money on snacks and there was no way we could afford the game. We could barely afford the

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

comic. Not to mention the shop didn't normally sell games, so I'm pretty sure this dude was trying to sell it on the side and wouldn't hold it for us until we had the cash. No, this is the story of how my best friend and I sat on my front steps with Swampy between us and lamented our poor financial choices.

It wasn't until a few years later that I actually got the game. The well-worn cartridge was missing most of the stick-on label and I had no way of knowing if it would even work, but I pulled it out of the used game bin at the farmers market and promised to love it no matter what. By then my aunt had accidentally snapped the string for Swampy's retractable hand. It seems even super mutants can overextend themselves and he would serve as pretzel butler no more. When I told my best friend I finally had the *Swamp Thing* game in my possession and was borrowing my uncle's Nintendo to play it she was just as excited as I was. In fact, she illegally printed a color Swamp Thing in the school computer lab so Swampy could join us in spirit.

Blowing into the cartridge, waiting for the white text on the license screen to turn into the start screen—these are memories that could fit any game. But the anticipation in this case was much more intense. We were nose-to-the-screen close when the opening animation started. The music was full of suspense and we were eager for Swamp Thing to make his entrance, but a weird California Raisin without sunglasses appeared first. The Grape Face was supposed to be Dr. Arcane, and his arrival brought the first fears that this game might not live up to the hype built by years of yearning. The flaming Holland fleeing to the swamp refueled our hopes, and the title screen was so perfect we cheered. If only ol' Swampy could see himself on the screen this way. Except Grape Face was back seconds later to remind us that nothing ever translates perfectly to video games.

We died. Repeatedly. In the first few minutes. Video game instinct taught us to avoid water so we jumped onto the floating can and couldn't figure out why we were taking damage. There was a lot of frantic yelling at the stupid game. It took a long time to realize we were one with the water and it would welcome our swampiness but the trash was painful. We were already halfway through the first level—thanks to dodging and quick reflexes alone—when we realized we could actually hurt the evil creatures attacking us by doing a weird swamp fart jump-punch-shoot. After that the game redeemed itself with some of the most bizarre things we'd ever seen, such as floating knives appearing from nowhere, eyeballs and Cthulhu heads attempting to kill us, swamp fart sound effects interrupted by mosquito fart noises, monkeys carrying spears, and ghosts of a Xenomorph wearing a smiley face mask above its mouth. We beat the first boss, who I now realize must be a relative of Trogdor the Burninator. Dr. Arcane, who looked like chewed grape Bubble-Yum, prepared to send more foes our way. He specifically said he wanted Swamp Thing ALIVE, so the fact they kept trying to kill us was a little confusing.

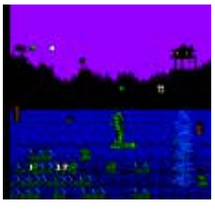
Level two greeted us with bouncing Phantasm balls, flying Evolver robots, and a layout that took seemingly forever to play by jumping around aimlessly. Turns out once you've got the hang of the game—which is just a lot of jumping really—it's pretty straightforward play. Not exactly easy, but doable if you manage to build up enough life to take the unavoidable hits. It was really cool to stand Swamp Thing in a safe spot and check out the details of the background because the programmers did a great job with texture and shading. The graphics really capture the feel of the comics in an immersive way.

In the third level we finally got to check out the swamp. There was an unintentional guest appearance by Pterri the pterodactyl from Pee-Wee's Playhouse, or so it seemed. Then we became one with the trees and climbed them as a pair of green gooey eyes. And—the best part—we squished our big Swampy self into a tiny apple and traveled through a sewer pipe like a Killer Tomato. By this point in the game the music we thought was so cool in the beginning was now driving us insane, and we were hoping this really was the last level so we could get on with our lives. Yes, we love Swamp Thing. Yes, we had dreamed about this game since that day in the comic shop. Yes, we were thrilled to finally be playing it.

But really, aside from the graphics, the strange creatures, and the obvious awesomeness of being Swamp Thing, there was nothing remarkable about it. It actually got boring during that second level, and we'd already finished most of our snacks during the trial and error it took to figure out the controls. My best friend had her feet on the back of the couch and her head on the floor and was having a conversation with paper Swampy about how lame the game was. I was almost ready to give up around the deforestation and planted cars section, but I felt I owed it to Swampy to ride it out. I'm glad I did. Being able to hide in the trees while fighting the bat that was poorly named Skin Man was actually pretty cool.

Unlike other games, which might amp your adrenaline with the last level leading up to the final fight, this final level in *Swamp Thing* felt pretty much the same as the previous levels. However, it was surprisingly hard, as figuring out where to jump next was not always intuitive. When I finally hit the last battle with the mutated Dr. Arcane my best friend regained interest. The pistachio zapped out the ultimate villain: Dr. Arcane had transformed from a Grape Face into a Spider-Blueberry Head. It was almost impossible to dodge the flames, the pistachio, and the final boss. Miraculously I did it, and we earned ourselves a beautiful tribute to Swamp Thing, may he rest in pieces. —Krystle Tiedeman, Librarian, Producer of *The King of Arcades*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Sword Master

PUBLISHER: Activision.
DEVELOPER: Athena.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Sword Master puts you in the role of a sword-swinging warrior, walking along battling such baddies as vampire bats, barbarians, knights, sword-wielding skeletons, dire wolves, creeping ghouls, zombies, evil eyes, lizard men, snakelike dragons, and other enemies, including the Grim Reaper. You also duck under enemy fire and jump over gaps and onto platforms, including double jumps. You can do a sidearm swing with your sword, swing it overhead, and do a low forward thrust, and you can use a shield to block enemy attacks and projectiles. By defeating the first blue knight (Knight of the Serpent) you will acquire the Magic Staff, which shoots short range energy balls. As you work your way through the game you can acquire other types of magic weapons from various enemies including bombs, fireballs, and vertical lightning beams. Killing certain enemies increases experience points that let you use your weapons. Some defeated enemies release potions that you can grab to refill your health bar. The game, which has a common sounding title but is very hard to find, features seven levels of play: Forest of Living Darkness, Village of Sheridon, Castle Entrance, The Courtyard, Castle Corridor, Dungeon, and Inner Keep.

Notable Quotable:

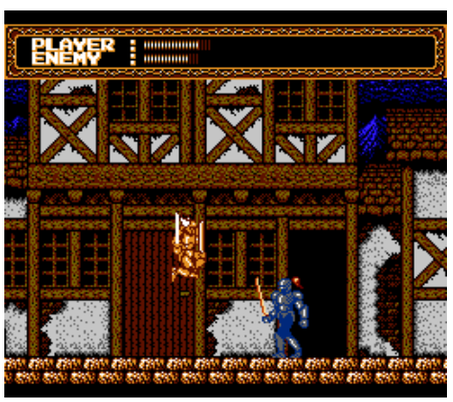
"It's as generic as its title implies, offering nothing new to ideas that have been done often—and better—in the not-so-distant past . . . Along with its anemic graphics and dinky sound/music, *Sword Master*, overall, is a rather tired gaming experience." —*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (April 1991)

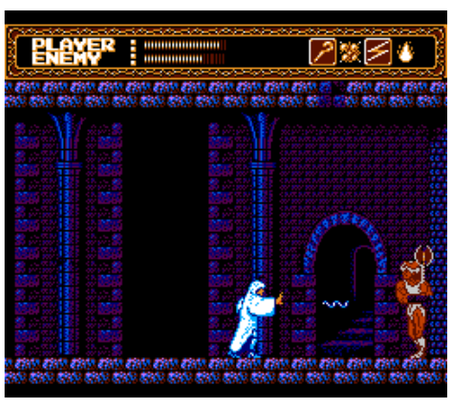
Notable Quotable:

"A nice little hidden gem that has some of the highest production values on the system and gameplay to match . . . It can be frustrating at times, especially toward the end . . . heavy emphasis on combat. Your knight can perform a surprising number of attacks and moves . . . Every new enemy has their own unique attack patterns and quirks, which makes these fights fun. Button mashing simply does not work and is the fastest way to get killed. Learning the subtleties of combat and when to dodge, block, and attack is incredibly fun, if a bit challenging . . . *Sword Master* has platforming segments. I'm not fond of these . . . The narrow ledges surrounded by invincible enemies will lead to constant deaths that you cannot afford . . . Character animation is smooth, and the game has a varied cast of large enemies. The only weak link is the music, which is simply forgettable." —ClassicGames.Net (www.classic-games.net)

Notable Quotable:

"Your protagonist, a knight in shining golden armor, is reasonably well-animated as he saunters along at a decent clip, almost with a Belmont-esque sort of gait. The sprites are of a decent size and are quite detailed, often toned in one or two colors that are often dark and subtle . . . It's nothing you haven't seen in any other Middle Ages tale, with forests and run down towns and castles and so forth, but it gets style points for keeping the vibe grim with colors on the opposite polar end of other fantasy fare like *Dragon Quest* and characters not as cartoony as *Wizards and Warriors* . . . good music that sounds as if it were composed for a lost *Castlevania* game . . . fast paced action game that offers much variety in its boss battles, and it looks and sounds good enough to stand alongside most other nineties NES games . . . really freaking difficult, and admittedly a bit unfair at times . . . deserves a play for retro action junkies who want to play something primarily focused on medieval combat and are willing to deal with the occasional fiddly bit of rocky platform jumping." —Michael Plasket (www.hardcoregaming101.net)





© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Swords and Serpents

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Interplay Productions.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Role-Playing Game, 1, 2, or 4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

An early fantasy RPG by Interplay, who would go on to create such games as *Fallout* and *Baldur's Gate*, *Swords and Serpents* has a party of one, two, or four players braving a 16-level dungeon filled with monsters, weapons (swords, staffs, daggers, and the like), magic spells (such as heal, thunder, flash fire, stun, and flight), armor, and more. The objective is to recover the treasures of the fabled Ruby Warrior and defeat an evil serpent that has been terrorizing the land. You can customize your party with rolls of virtual dice until you get the desired stats for each character, or use the pregenerated party consisting of three different character classes: warrior, thief, and magician, each rated according to strength, intelligence, agility, hit points, and magic points. Defeating bats, giant spiders, zombies, armored warriors, and the like via turn-based battles earns experience points, which make you a stronger, more effective fighter. You can also earn gold for purchasing items. Enemy encounters are random, and you'll battle anywhere from one to eight monsters at a time. Your party members level up in unison, instead of individually. Monsters drop armor and weapons as well that you can pick up. Zoom tubes let you retreat quickly to places you have already been and an auto-mapping system helps track your progress. Retreat to one of the game's three temples if you lose a party member or need regeneration. You view the first-person maze action on the left side of the split screen. The right side displays the map with an arrow indicating your party's position. The bottom section shows the character stats.

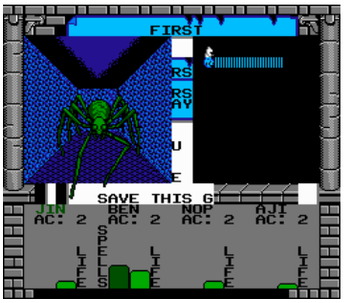
SCANNER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"First person perspective maze/RPGs are becoming more popular. Acclaim's has several new twists in it to make it different—a four-player option, and the overview map which becomes visible as you move through the maze. Decent graphic detail and devious mazes make it interesting . . . it takes a real commitment to play for a long time." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1990)

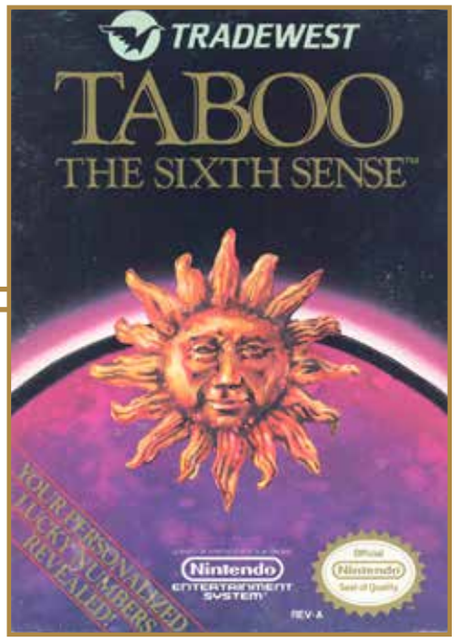
Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are absolutely great. The atmosphere is fun, and even the music is kind of cool . . . The fighting mechanics are fun . . . It's too damned hard, and there are enemies literally everywhere. Even in the armory you can get tagged by bats, spiders, or other assorted stock baddies . . . The game pretends to have a save feature. You click on save, and what do you get? Five passwords; one for the stage and one for each character . . . a decent fantasy game." —Aaron Dennis (vocal.media)



Taboo: The Sixth Sense

PUBLISHER: Tradewest.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Fortune Teller Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



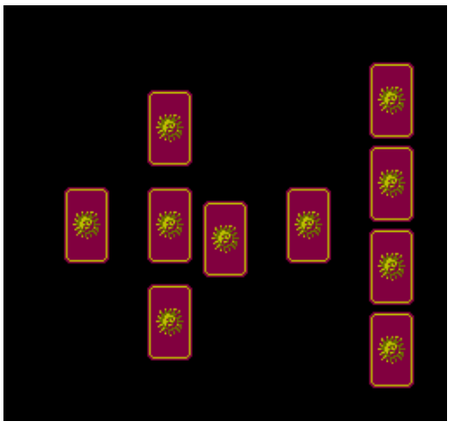
Are you into hokum and hooey like fortune tellers and getting your palm read? Then maybe *Taboo*, a tarot card "game," will be right up your alley. You begin by entering your name, birth date, gender, and a question about the future. An oracle then gives you a 10-card reading consisting of such vague answers as "Your present position is a possible journey or travel or a need to flee from reality" or "Your near term goal or destiny is influenced by great determination." After the final card has been revealed the computer will give you your lucky numbers. The screen depicts text, cards, and simple static images. The game was originally packaged with a special velvet bag to store the cartridge, and the instruction manual featured a brief history and explanation of tarot cards. Skeptics need not apply.

Memories: I've had friends who claim they are psychic. Other friends have been tarot card readers and fortune tellers. I once dated a girl who believed in the healing power of crystals. Yeah, I have interesting friends. Do I believe their abilities or claims? Do I believe in the predictive powers of tarot cards? Not for a second, but *Taboo* can be fun to play around with for a few minutes.

Notable Quotable:
"Who really needs a video game version of tarot cards? The mystical responses aren't even interesting." —*The 1990 Video Game Buyer's Guide* (from *Electronic Gaming Monthly*), which awarded *Taboo* the "Most Ridiculous Premise for a Game"

Notable Quotable:
"At least mildly interesting for a few rounds. However, we don't think it holds much interest after that, unless you happen to be fascinated by the occult in general and tarot card reading in particular. We're inclined to dismiss this one as strictly a novelty item with very limited appeal." —*Computer Entertainer* (May 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"I wish *Taboo* had the ability to draw three- and four-digit numbers instead of just two-digit ones . . . The graphics are well done. The constant black background gives the program an air of mystery, which, of course, is perfectly appropriate. The theme music also fits the program. There are only a few sound effects which are used for some of the more important trump cards . . . a novelty item . . . definitely the sort of cartridge you can pull out at parties and use to amuse your friends." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)



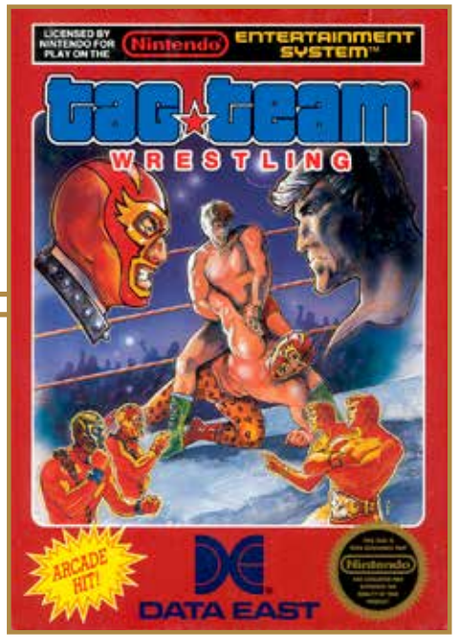
Insider Insight: I played *Taboo* exactly one time and then gave it to a friend because I was afraid I would get caught with it. I bought it at a farmers market as part of a buy-one-get-one-free deal and carefully hid it from my grandmother, because the box said ages fourteen and up. I was not fourteen. I was breaking the law. I'd heard the game was the NES equivalent of a Ouija board or tarot cards, containing adult images and otherworldly topics. One kid even said it was cursed. I smuggled it into my friend's house for a sleepover party and we all huddled around the television with the volume low and one friend on the remote to change the channel and bring on the static if a parent wandered to the basement to check on us. We were playing with real serious stuff here. The balance of time. Our fortunes. Psychedelic backgrounds.

We spent all night taking turns asking the magical Nintendo cartridge deep and troublesome queries. "Does Eric like Ashley?" "When will I die?" "Does Eric like the other Ashley?" "Will I pass my math test?" "Does Eric really like the other Ashley?" Issues of great importance. We helped each other interpret the sage advice from the digital cards, greatly influenced by whether the music sounded happy or not. There was great debate about whether to put our actual date of birth or fudge the year to make us fourteen. On one hand, if we put our real ages, the game would know we weren't old enough to play. On the other, the game was magic and would know we were lying. In the end we had a lot of conflicting ideas and a bunch of lucky numbers we couldn't use because we were also too young to play the lottery. —Krystle Tiedeman, Librarian, Producer of *The King of Arcades*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tag Team Wrestling

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Sakata SAS.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Wrestling, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1986.



Pitting the "Ricky Fighters," Ricky and Ultramachine, against the "Strong Bads," Worly and Mascross, *Tag Team Wrestling* was the first wrestling title for the NES, and it was the first console wrestling game with tag team gameplay. Unfortunately the game is hopelessly dated, as evidenced by its odd (if workable) control technique. Once a wrestler has grabbed his opponent the player must quickly cycle through a list to select the desired move. Wrestling moves include body slam, drop kick, body attack, back drop, neck hanging, back breaker, flying head butt, ring post, sasori gatame, western lariat, brain buster, and enzui giri. By leaving the ring wrestlers can acquire weapons to use against their opponent, but you should be careful not to remain outside the ring for 20 seconds or you'll be disqualified. The other ways a match will end is with a pin or when someone gives up. Wrestlers low on energy or caught in an unbreakable hold can call on a partner for help; hence the "tag" in the title. The elevated view of the nonscrolling ring is from the side. Based on the 1984 Data East arcade game, but with simplified graphics and a few missing moves.

Notable Quotable:

"Wrestling video games have come a long way since this gem surfaced on the NES . . . wasn't exactly a masterpiece of graphic quality when it was released . . . It is confusing if you are just used to button mashing . . . doesn't seem to have stood the test of time." —*Game Informer* #74 (June 1999)

Notable Quotable:

"NES version better than C64 . . . Animation is smoother on the NES and the fighters are better drawn. Sound is much better, too, including a little voice synthesis when the referee gives the three-count on pins. Controlling the various wrestling moves is a little easier because of the two action buttons on the NES." —*Computer Entertainer* (December 1986)

Notable Quotable:

"Most of the animation in this game was accomplished by turning the little guys sideways . . . For example, a body slam would consist of one wrestler suddenly appearing sideways above another wrestler's head. The graphics jump around like this so much it may look like something has gone wrong with your Nintendo. Don't worry, it's just a bad game . . . bad graphics and unresponsive controls." —Seanbaby (www.seanbaby.com), who ranked *Tag Team Wrestling* the fourth-worst NES game

GAME INFORMER PUBLISHING

Tagin' Dragon

PUBLISHER: Bunch Games.
DEVELOPER: Sachen.
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

In what has to be the strangest juvenile concept for a video game since *Sneak 'n Peek* for the Atari 2600, where you played hide-and-seek, *Tagin' Dragon* is old school all the way, with gamers essentially playing tag with a bunch of dragons (hence the odd title). You guide your dragon around a series of timed, top-down, *Bomberman*-like mazes, each of which is marked by square-shaped bushes, permanent blocks, time zones, and ice zones. Your object is to bite the tail of the other dragon(s) in the maze while avoiding getting bit. Time zones are lethal if stayed in too long, while ice zones make your dragon go faster. Grabbing a magic lantern clears out the bushes to reveal bonus items (for extra points), while snatching up eggs gives players extra lives. Modes of play include Player vs. 3 Dragons, Both Players vs. 3 Dragons, and Player vs. Player. Unlicensed and very hard to find, *Tagin' Dragon* was first released in Asia under the less lyrical title *Colorful Dragon*.

Memories: While I tend to thoroughly enjoy maze games, *Tagin' Dragon* is clearly one of the lesser entries in the genre. It evokes such titles as *Jungler* (arcade, Arcadia 2001), *Nibbler* (arcade), and *Trog!* (arcade, NES), but it lacks the polish, graphical appeal, and solid controls of those games. I was always intrigued by the light-blue cartridge, though, as I got tired of the standard gray NES cart design.

Notable Quotable:

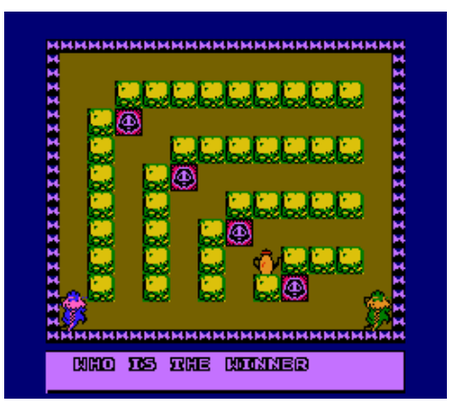
"This forgotten NES title is a real one-two punch. It features awful music on top of one of the most hilariously bad title screens in history." —Dan Ryckert (www.gameinformer.com)

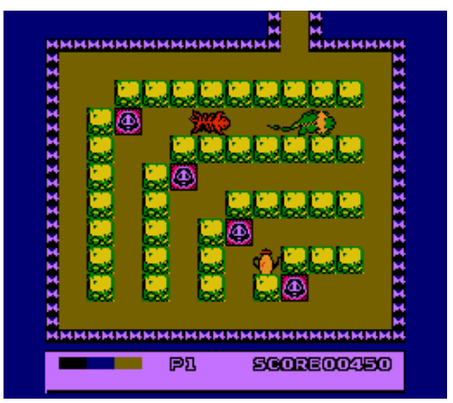
Notable Quotable:

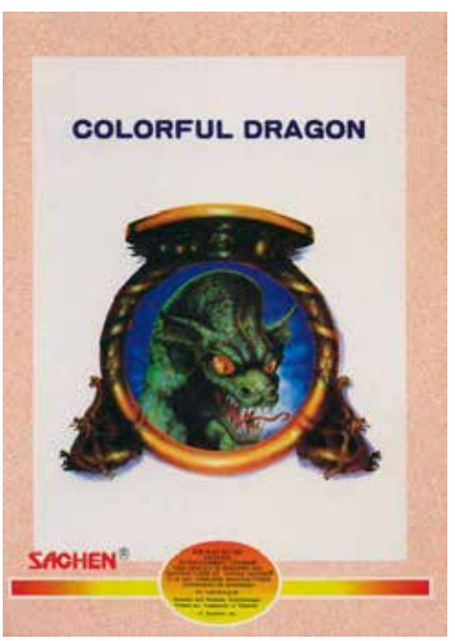
"As a kid I rented this game from the video store. [It] was not common to find games without the Nintendo seal of approval, so how I got the misfortune to play this, I don't know . . . You wish these dragons would do something awesome like breathe fire or fly . . . I had no idea it was possible to make dragons so boring." —Angry Video Game Nerd (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"The only reason this game gets a one star review is that it is playable. You really can sit down, turn it on, play it, and maybe even enjoy it. It is a game. There is a progression involved. But, boy, other than that, this feels like a freshman effort in some kid's basement, or the depressing result of a shared idea made into reality with unskilled hands. Never before have I believed that the title screen says so much about a game." —Eric Bailey (nintendolegend.com)



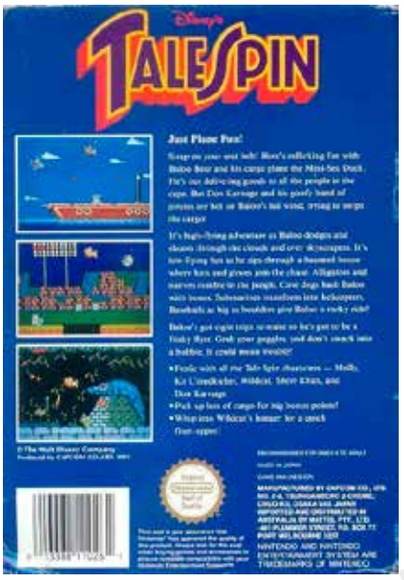




© SCHILLER PUBLISHING

TaleSpin

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

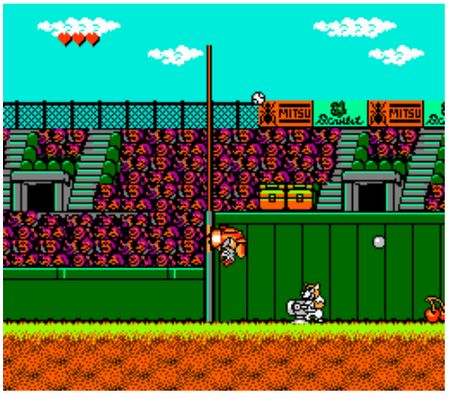


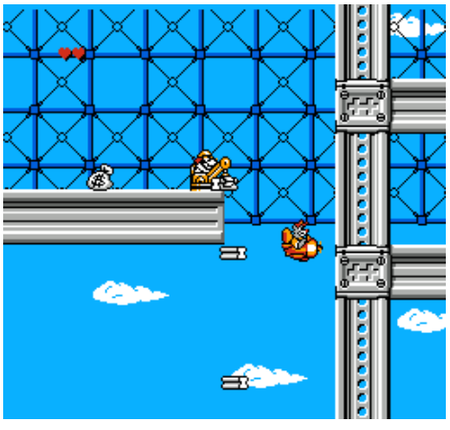
A colorful game aimed at cartoon fans, *TaleSpin* puts you, as Baloo Bear, at the helm of your flying Mini Sea-Duck, which is an unusual vehicle for a side-scrolling shooter in that it can hover, fly upside down, and turn around. Turning around is useful for backtracking and grabbing items, some of which are revealed by shooting balloons, walls, clouds, and buildings. Initially the Sea-Duck can fire only one cannonball at a time, but collecting money bags earns cash for purchasing rapid shots, as well as extra lives, armor, speed, and continues. In addition to shooting air pirates, Baloo must avoid bubbles, baseballs, ghosts, falling steel beams, and other obstacles. Levels include Over the Sea, Baseball Stadium, In the Stormy Sky, Haunted House, High Above the City, Mining Tunnels, Jungle Junket, and Snowy Alps. Hidden bonus rounds feature Kit Cloudkicker riding his airfoil while popping balloons and flying through fruit. Based on the Disney animated series that ran from 1990 to 1991 for a total of 65 episodes.

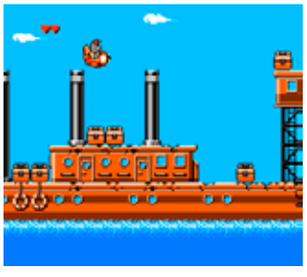
Notable Quotable:
"If you fancy a shoot-'em-up with some nicely drawn cartoon graphics, spin your tail with this. However, I think most *Talespin* fans will be disappointed." —*N-Force* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics are great, the music is good, and the theme is solid. The only part of the game that's questionable is the difficulty. Advancement comes with practice, practice, and more practice. If your kids can tolerate some frustration the game is highly recommended." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"This is basically a flying, scrolling shooter, but it's quite fun . . . The controls are pretty easy once you get the hang of them, but can be tricky at first . . . Maybe I'm just a sucker for powerups, but I had a lot of fun with this game. The graphics really add to the enjoyment . . . There're a lot of hidden items and little zones, but other than that there isn't much replay value. There aren't variable skill levels or anything so once you beat it, you've beaten it." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)







SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Target: Renegade

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

You are a rugged street tough named Renegade. Thanks to your stunning victory in the previous game (simply called *Renegade*) Mr. Big has kidnapped your brother, Matt. You must fight your way through seven levels of thugs, bikers, skaters, and gang bangers to rescue him. Your fighting moves consist of punching and kicking and performing flying kicks, foot sweeps, and head butts (not mentioned in the manual—tap forward to execute this move). You can also knock baseball bats and knives out of your enemies' hands and equip them yourself. The first three levels take place in a parking garage. Here you will face the Sleazy Riders, the Chilles, the Bat Boys, the South Side Stranglers, and a boss named Big Bob. Level four is downtown, which is home of the Dagger Dudes, the Bruise Brigade, and a boss named Siggy, who shows his ugly mug in the park as well. The Skate Lords and the Hammer Heads call the park their turf. The penultimate rumble takes place uptown, which is home of the Karate Klan and the Bouncers. The final battle is in a place called the Pig Pen. Here you will face Bouncers, the Bruise Brigade, and Mr. Big himself.

Notable Quotable:

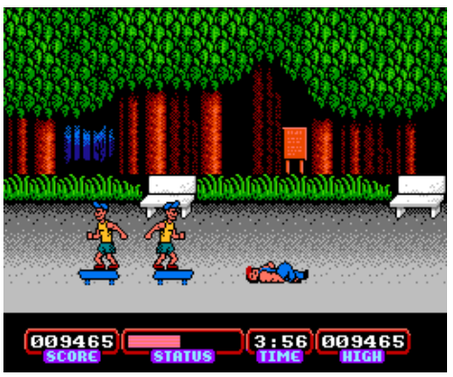
"While the intentions of this *Double Dragon* wannabe are nice, the execution of the idea is just awful. Although the music and backgrounds are quite detailed, the characters are very pale by comparison and suffer from tons of flicker . . . I expected much more and this game didn't deliver." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1990)

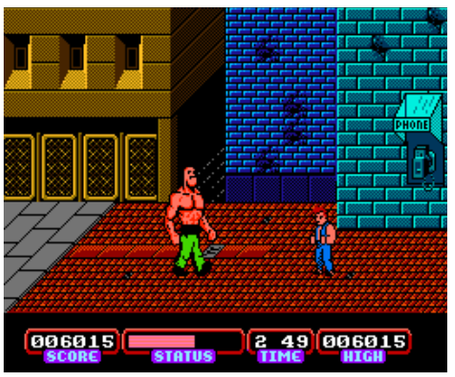
Notable Quotable:

"The original *Renegade* game wasn't great, but at least it had a unique control scheme. *Target: Renegade* on the other hand has absolutely no redeeming qualities. It's like *Double Dragon* minus the fun! As you guide a pudgy muscleman through repetitive scenery you face the same group of thugs (who all dress the same) over and over again. The non-stop punch/kick gameplay is mind numbing, and the ability to jump-kick cyclists off of their bikes provides little relief. The generic backdrops are awful and serious breakup occurs in the character graphics . . . pure agony." — Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The lack of any true combos brings the game down a notch . . . No uppercuts, roundhouses, or foot sweeps here, just basic straight punches and kicks . . . the monotony of the gameplay brings the entire package down. Not only are the moves limited, but performing some of them, such as a jump-kick, are complicated by a ludicrous control scheme. Not only are the gameplay ideas borrowed from numerous other games, but the game's graphics and sounds are ripped right out of other classics as well . . . The animation is severely limited, with very little of the upper body ever moving. The bosses look decent and are usually quite large, making them somewhat impressive." —Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

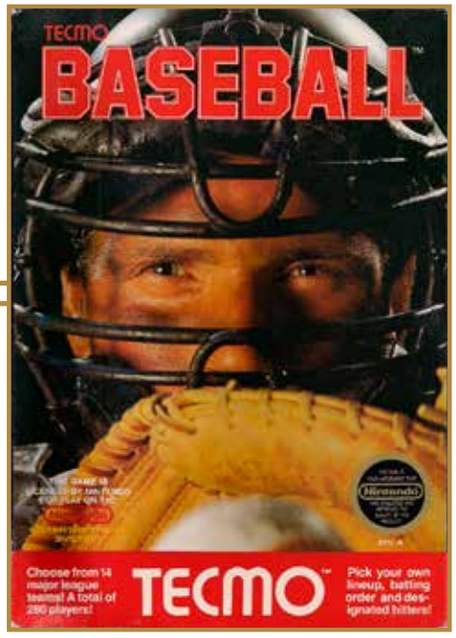


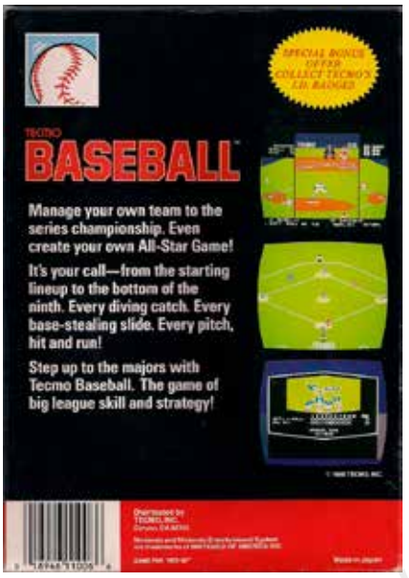


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tecmo Baseball

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.





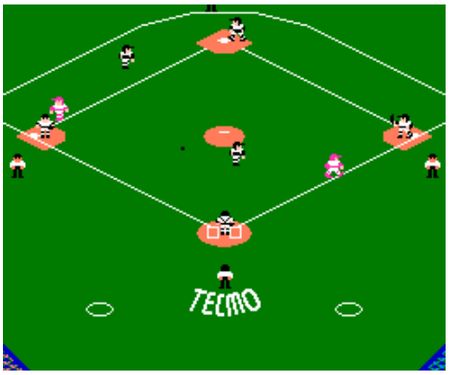
Tecmo Baseball doesn't hold the same stature as its widely praised football counterpart, *Tecmo Bowl*, but it is a solid rendition of America's favorite pastime. The game can be played in standard or All-Star mode and with or without the DH rule. The third-person, behind-the-pitcher viewpoint allows for large players, and, like most baseball video games, the perspective changes to overhead once the ball has been hit. Pitchers can select from four different throws: normal, fast ball, curve ball, and breaking ball. You can adjust the position of the pitcher on the mound and influence the aim, curve, and speed of the ball. For fly balls you can get the fielder nearest the ball to jump and catch it. When you're at bat, you can move left and right in the batter's box and swing low, high, or in the center. You can't advance all the base runners at once. Rather, you select the individual runners with the d-pad. There are 14 squads (for a total of 280 players), each named after a Major League US city or state, but player names are generic and there are no team mascots. Other features include bunting, stealing, time outs, tagging up, pinch hitting, and relief pitching.

Notable Quotable:

"There are a lot of team and player combinations that make this game interesting—varying your starting pitchers, pitting various teams against each other—but that isn't enough to recommend *Tecmo Baseball*. Pitchers have a relatively easy time throwing strikes, whereas with batters it's more a matter of luck than skill to hit the ball. Okay animation, but the game is by nature pretty static. Irritating, repetitive music and scratchy crowd sounds; only the bat-hitting-ball sounds are excellent." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:

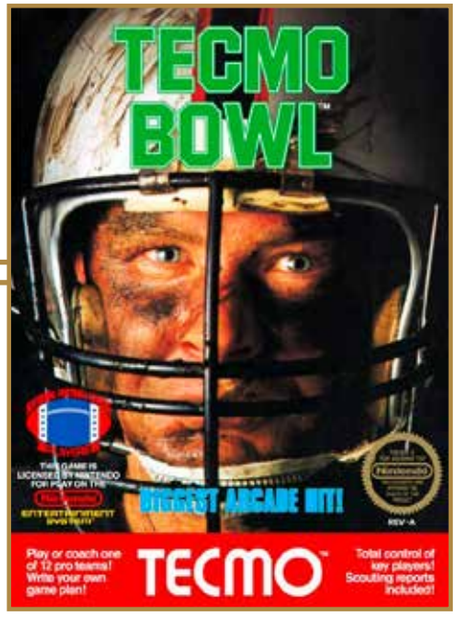
"Batting is simple, just swing when the ball gets to you. You can move the bat up or down to hit the ball at a better angle, but I had a hard enough time just trying to make contact . . . Controlling players in the field isn't too bad, but I had some trouble judging where the ball would land. It's worse in the outfield, since it takes a while before the screen moves enough to show the fielder . . . The sprites for the pitcher and batter look pretty good, but on the field players look bad, and the scoreboard is bland, similar to *Major League Baseball* . . . The ump says 'ball,' 'strike,' and 'out,' and it's easy to understand him . . . the music is pleasant enough and plays throughout the game, and not just at the menu screen like in *Major League Baseball* . . . Overall I had a pretty good time playing this game." —American Wargamers Association (www.americanwargamersassociation.com)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tecmo Bowl

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.



Tecmo Bowl, perhaps the first truly great console football simulation, lets you select from 12 nonlicensed teams, each named after an NFL city: Indianapolis, San Francisco, Chicago, Miami, Cleveland, Denver, Seattle, Los Angeles, Washington, Dallas, New York, and Minnesota. Each team features actual NFL players from the 1988 season (with attributes to match), including such stars as Herschel Walker, Dan Marino, Joe Montana, and Walter Payton. You can challenge the computer to an 11-team tournament, play against a friend in a single game, or sit back and call plays as the coach. The game lacks a number of features, such as fumbles, onside kicks, and touchbacks, but it offers fun, fast-paced action and detailed, nicely animated graphics. Controls are simple, and each of the teams has four different plays to run (defense selects from the same list as offense). When quarterbacking, you can cycle through your receivers before passing. Or you can hand the ball off to the running back. Then you control the ball carrier as he avoids defenders, running with the d-pad and breaking tackles by repeatedly pressing a button. If you make a certain type of big play a cinematic cutscene will appear. Compared to its 1987 arcade counterpart the game has various differences, including nine-player teams (as opposed to 10) and the lack of a jump button (though players can break tackles and make diving tackles). A favorite among longtime NES fans, *Tecmo Bowl* remains a pop culture touchstone.

Notable Quotable:
"While other, more realistic games would take over the genre, Tecmo's little masterpiece still remains an undeniable classic . . . Gameplay is stripped to the bare basics of football strategy . . . There is little challenge put up by the computer . . . The only real way to play *Tecmo Bowl* is with another player." — Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Just like the real game, calling plays is a mind game between you and your opponent. That's the beauty of *Tecmo Bowl* . . . a great satisfaction with calling the right defense and stuffing your opponent. We've come a long way since *Tecmo* first hit the NES in 1989, but we have to say that this is still one of the best football games ever." —*Game Informer* (January 1999)

Notable Quotable:
"A flawed but entertaining game. Open receivers catch whatever you throw. The stocky players look like Gummi Footballers; when there are several of them close together it's very difficult to tell who's doing what to whom . . . The music is anything but stirring and sound effects are negligible. The voice synthesizer is good, however. Kickoff returns, running plays, and setting up to pass under pressure are all extremely realistic." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Insider Insight: Everyone who's under 30 knows *Tecmo Bowl* because of the YouTube videos and mentions on *Family Guy*, but I know about the game for another reason. When I was a kid my dad worked at a printing company in New York City. They printed labels, manuals, and the like. My dad ran the machines and shared an office with my uncle. There was an NES there, and that was one of the reasons why I loved going to work with my father.

While they played *Ice Hockey*, *Bad News Baseball*, and *R.B.I. Baseball* (they probably played games there more than they worked), *Tecmo Bowl* was where the real bloodshed happened. My father would come home from work and describe his victories in vivid detail at the dinner table: "Montana, pass over the middle to Craig, broke three tackles. Your uncle, the baby, was crying like a little ___." Or, on a bad day, "Your uncle is a cheater. I know he's cheating. I just don't know how he's doing it. That son of a ___." Eventually my dad snuck the game home and played against me and we had a blast.

Tecmo Bowl is still playable today, and while my dad isn't the gamer he used to be, he remembers it fondly. When most people think of football games they immediately go to *Madden*. But years before *Madden*, Tecmo created a wonderful series with real NFL players that was—and still is—incredibly fun. – Patrick Hickey Jr., author of *The Minds Behind the Games* book series

SCHEER PUBLISHING

Tecmo Cup Soccer Game

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer/Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Far harder to find than other Tecmo sports games for the NES, *Tecmo Cup Soccer Game* takes a different path from most games in its genre in favor of something altogether different: a sports RPG, complete with storyline and the leveling up of characters. You follow the career of Robin Field, son of Terry Field, a famous soccer player. Robin competes in the National Tournament for Junior Youth. After winning he can enter the Tecmo Cup (consisting of a league tournament and a championship tournament) with an all-star team called the Tops. Soccer actions such as dribbling, shooting, passing, stealing, slide tackling, and penalty kicks are integral to gameplay, but they are selected from text-based menus on the bottom half of the screen and displayed via cutscene-like animations on the top half of the screen.

When trying to stop a shot as the goalie you can choose to catch or punch the ball. As a game progresses Robin and his teammates' abilities will improve. The aforementioned cutscenes tell the story and an announcer at the bottom of the screen calls the action via text. Based on the Japanese anime series *Captain Tsubasa*, which was what the Famicom version of the game was called, *Tecmo Cup Soccer Game* features 12 different teams and 18 different characters.

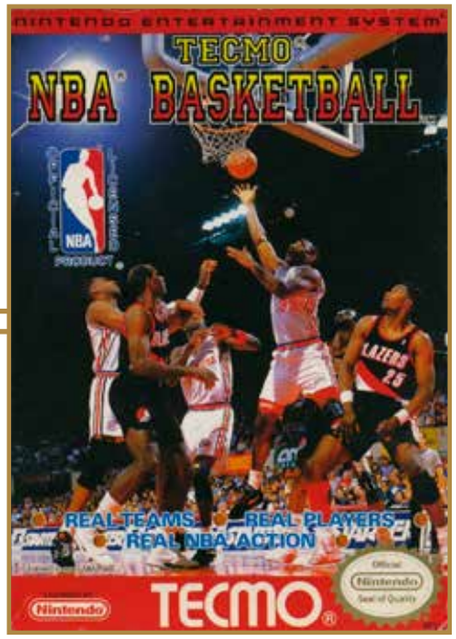
Memories: As a kid I was obsessed with soccer. I played at school during recess and would listen to Dallas Tornado soccer games on my little transistor radio. When the commercial for the Dallas Tornado would play over the loudspeaker in the arcade at Malibu Grand Prix I would get super excited. For some reason that passion for playing and listening to real soccer never translated to video games. I blame it on *Pelé's Soccer* for the Atari 2600.

Notable Quotable:
"Almost like a card game, where you continually monitor the situation and use the best player for the given scenario. It's thrilling when you manage to outsmart the computer and scoring a goal is rewarding. The graphics are impressive and do a great job of depicting the action and keeping things exciting. Where the game falls down is on defense, as you have barely any control. Most of the time you watch helplessly as the CPU dribbles freely towards your goal while all your defenders seemingly have a snooze . . . an ambitious take on the sport . . . While the defensive side is lackluster, there's still a lot to love about the offensive options . . . sheer amount of strategy involved can be extremely addictive." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tecmo NBA Basketball

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



While inferior to its Super Nintendo counterpart, *Tecmo NBA Basketball* for the NES is a features rich hoops title with equal parts simulation and arcade style action. Viewed from an elevated side view perspective, the five-on-five gameplay includes all 27 NBA teams of the era; battery-backed team and player statistics; callable offensive plays; and 324 players, including Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan, Isiah Thomas, David Robinson, Charles Barkley, Patrick Ewing, and other greats, each rated according to speed, jumping, stealing, blocking, shooting range, and stamina. The game also features time outs, overtime, injuries, fouls, substitutions, an offensive playbook, and the following game modes: Preseason, Regular Season (which includes playoffs and the NBA Finals), and All-Star Game. You can even adjust the speed and length of games. Players jump when they shoot free throws, which is pretty silly.

The thick instruction manual deserves mention, as it features detailed info on each real NBA team. *Double Dribble* remains the most fondly remembered basketball title for the NES, but *Tecmo NBA Basketball*, despite heavy flickering, is worthy of recommendation.

Notable Quotable:

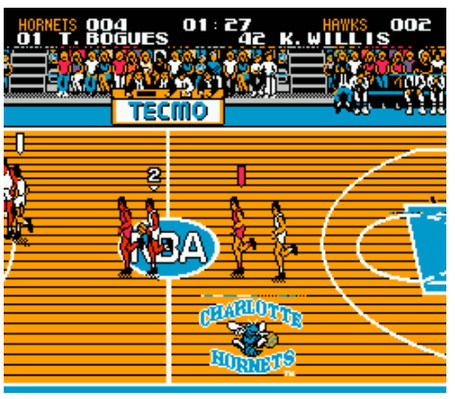
"Although the rosters in this game are heavily outdated the basic mechanics of this game are sound, and the modes offered are certainly enough to keep a basketball fan busy for a while. This is no *NBA 2K* or *NBA Live* series game, but it is a good basketball game nonetheless for those who can live with worse graphics and archaic rosters. If you are a fan of basketball, and you own an NES, this is about the best you can find on the system for the sport." —Game Freaks 365 (gamefreaks365.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The shooting in the game is topnotch. All players have appropriate range factors for the players they really were; Chris Mullin can pop threes all day long but Mark Eaton can't . . . fast paced gameplay . . . Good ball movement leads to open shots . . . there is no post-up option. This cuts down on the offensive strategy . . . Going for a steal usually just fouls the player dribbling. You're better off just letting the computer handle the defending . . . almost every player in the game looks alike, excluding skin tone color. Each court also looks similar, except for the logos." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

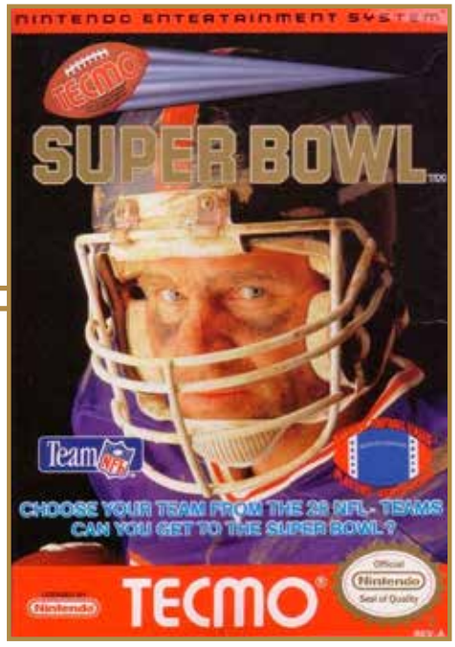
"The cinematic intro to *Tecmo NBA Basketball* gets you totally amped up as a camera pans down an expansive arena packed with spectators. Cutscenes of players in action are then displayed in a rapid fire manner. If only the actual game was this exciting . . . The numbers 1 or 2 appear over the user-controlled players, but vertical bars are used to indicate which players you can pass to. As a result it looks like a whole lot of 1s out there . . . The ball doesn't stand out, so even when you know your team has the ball (they all head down court) it's hard to tell which player has it . . . Once you get the hang of it *Tecmo Basketball* is playable enough. I like how players mirror the talents of their real life counterparts and it's satisfying to finish strong at the hoop." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tecmo Super Bowl

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



Tecmo Super Bowl ups the ante on the original *Tecmo Bowl*, which was already great, with better graphics and more plays, including offensive and defensive playbooks. There are 30 players per team, each rated according to such attributes as running speed, rushing power, hitting power, passing speed, passing control, and/or passing ability. Their condition is taken into account as well, from excellent, to in a slump, to sidelined with an injury. Each player, including such stars as Joe Montana, John Elway, Bo Jackson, and Emmitt Smith, is based on real data from the 1991/92 NFL season. Gamers can experience the entire 1991 NFL season using any of the 28 NFL teams of the era. Other features and options include Coach vs. Coach mode, Pro Bowl games, coin tosses, substitutions, onside kicks, blocked passes and kicks, fumbles, dive tackles, jumps (to block a kick or pass), pitchouts to the running back, the ability to break tackles, savable season stats (via battery backup), and more. While *Tecmo Bowl* consisted of nine-on-nine action, *Tecmo Super Bowl* lets each team field 11 onscreen players (with zero slowdown and some minor flickering), just like in real football. A passionate fan base hacks/updates the game each year to reflect current NFL teams, players, stats, and the like.

Notable Quotable:

"While the original *Tecmo Bowl* may be remembered as the first great console football title, its successor, *Tecmo Super Bowl*, is the franchise's crown jewel." —*Game Informer* (May 2007)

Notable Quotable:

"Improved on the original in every way . . . one of the best football games ever . . . The graphics are very good. Although the players themselves are smaller than in *Tecmo Bowl*, this allows more of the action to be seen, especially on the sidelines, where you get to see officials, cheerleaders, and even the first down markers . . . The sprites have smooth animation, and there isn't a bit of slowdown with all the players running around . . . decent background music . . . cool bone-crunching sound effects that accompany all the hard hits. There's even some great voice clips, such as the quarterback yelling 'Hut! Hut! Hut!' and the announcer screaming 'Touchdown!'" — NES Times (www.nestimes.net)

Notable Quotable:

"Embodies the best of the old school 8-bit football style. It plays less like a coaching sim than modern football games, yet it nevertheless avoids being an all-out action title, too. By walking the line between the genre's two extremes, *Super Bowl* continued Tecmo's trend of producing top flight sports games (with great soundtracks!) . . . improves on its predecessor in several respects . . . maintains the brisk pace of the previous game while adding more play options and a wider variety of field condition simulation elements . . . A set of diehard fans continues to release annual roster update patches for the NES ROM, allowing devotees to experience the current season through the *Tecmo Bowl* medium. Any game that can inspire that degree of loyalty has got to be worth something." —Polygon (www.polygon.com), which ranked *Tecmo Super Bowl* the 15th-greatest NES game

Insider Insight: A clear upgrade to an already amazing first entry in the series, *Tecmo Super Bowl* is just what the title says—super! With every NFL franchise (circa 1991), a battery to save your stats, and a deep regular season mode to track your progress towards a Super Bowl championship, this was the football sim that all of us NFL fans were waiting for.

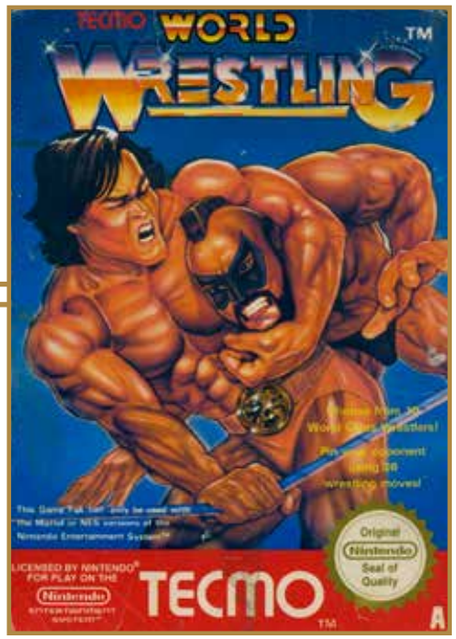
Tecmo Super Bowl added cutscenes showing injuries (don't worry, no Joe Theismann-esque gruesomeness), spectacular plays, and penalties. The only bad thing is the wonky battery. I remember numerous times that I would be halfway or more through a season and turn on my Nintendo to find out that my entire season had been erased. I recall either reading somewhere or hearing from someone that you were supposed to press restart and power simultaneously when turning off your Nintendo after saving your progress, but I never noticed that it made a difference and promptly disregarded the advice.

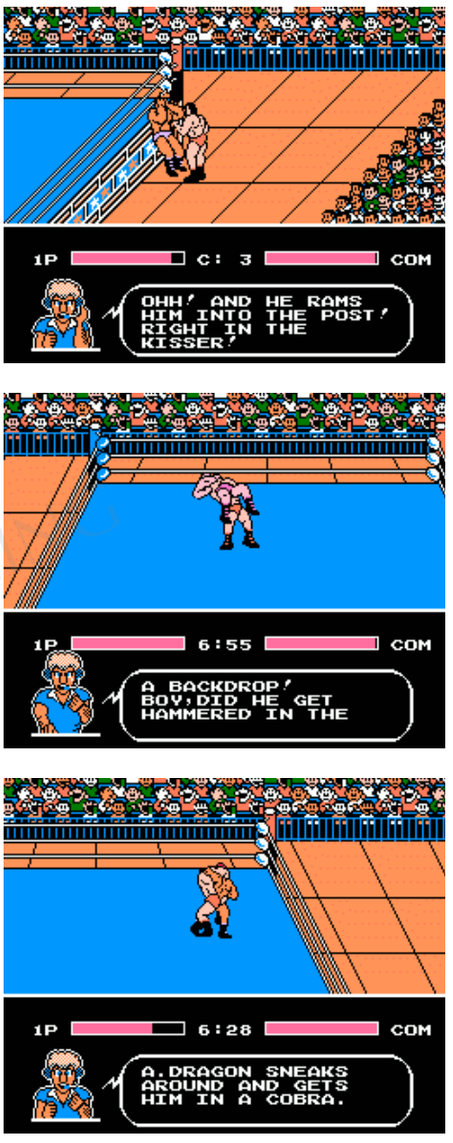
The Green Bay Packers were my team, but this was before their '90s resurgence under Coach Holmgren, quarterback Brett Favre, and defensive tackle Reggie White. The Packers of 1991 were a middling bunch, and while it was much easier to win a Super Bowl with the Bills, Cowboys, or 49ers, winning it all with my below-average Packer team was the most rewarding way for me to help my home state team bring the Lombardi trophy back to Wisconsin. —Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tecmo World Wrestling

PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Wrestling, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



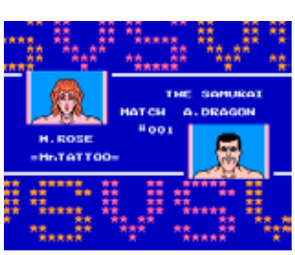


The TWW Title Crown is on the line in *Tecmo World Wrestling*. You select from 10 fictional wrestlers, including such characters as Akira "The Samurai" Dragon, Jackie "Kung-Fu Master" Lee, and Randy "The Flying Grenade" Gomez. Each wrestler can pull off a variety of moves, including kick, punch, stomp, knee lift, brain buster, body slam, headlock, back drop, pile driver, clothesline, shoulder throw, diving body attack, flying knee drop, and metal post slam. These are common to all wrestlers, but some moves, such as elbow drop, giant swing, cobra twist, and German suplex, can only be done by certain characters. Climbing ropes, fighting outside of the ring, and picking up and throwing your opponent are part of the action as well. You can have your wrestler run in eight different directions, pin their opponent, and break the pin. When the two fighters collide while standing they'll grapple. Indeed, there are lots of moves in the game. Stronger moves require more complex button presses. There are no tournament or tag team modes (in one player mode you simply fight each wrestler), but you can play a Muscle Training mode where you mash buttons to give your wrestler more powerful attacks.

Notable Quotable:
"An unusually well done wrestling game . . . a large selection of moves . . . smooth animation, detailed cinema closeups . . . has graphics that are above average, but the wrestlers could have had a bit more detail. Training screens are a nice touch. It is difficult to perform some special moves." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"How could I forget the cutscenes? Watching elaborate slams and suplexes in glorious 8-bit cinematics captured my imagination immediately. I also loved the take-offs of popular wrestlers that Tecmo had going on here. Try to spot the Hulk Hogan and Big Van Vader rips!" —Jeremy Dunham (www.ign.com), IGN Games Editorial Manager

Notable Quotable:
"I watch WWF Wrestling on Sky telly and think it's a great laugh, and I'm pleased to see that all the fun and action has been captured in this console version of the sport, with each wacky wrestler capable of an incredible variety of moves—some of them are amazing! The commentary that appears under the main screen is a laugh—it's as inane as the real thing! If you're looking at the screenshots don't be misled. The graphics might look simple when they're static, but it's a different kettle of fish when they're moving—the animation is superb, and there are loads of neat touches, like the spanging ropes and clambering back into the ring when you get chucked out . . . a thoroughly enjoyable game packed with loads of original features." —*Mean Machines* (December 1990)



© SCHILLER PUBLISHING

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.

A bestselling third-party title, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* stars the pizza-loving heroes of comic book, movie, cartoon, and toy fame. You can play as any of the titular tortoises. Michelangelo wields nunchakus, Raphael fights with dual sai daggers, Donatello battles using a bo, and Leonardo carries katana blades. All four can jump, climb ladders, and battle Fire Freaks, Foot Clan Soldiers, and other enemies, including iron-jawed Mouser and such bosses as Bebop and Rock Steady, Mecaturtle, Technodrome Guardian, and Big Mouser. The ultimate battle is against Shredder, who has kidnapped April O'Neil. Helpful items and weapons you can pick up as you go include boomerangs, shurikens, kiai (which are thrown in a straight line), pizza (energy), anti–Foot Clan missiles (for destroying enemy barricades), and rope (for leaping from building to building). The side-scrolling combat areas are complemented by a swimming stage and overhead view action where you drive the Turtle van around mazelike streets, shooting other vehicles. The characters are uneven in terms of ability and the stages themselves—sewers, warehouses, the streets of New York, and the like—are uneven in terms of difficulty. The game can be downright frustrating, but it remains enjoyable and nostalgic for many NES fans who grew up in the late '80s and early '90s.

Memories: I was working at Lone Star Comics during the tail end of the black-and-white comic book boom of the 1980s, and I was a major comic book fan well before that. Therefore, I was well aware of Mirage Studios' *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* comic books, created by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird, prior to the release of the Archie comic book series, the cartoon, the NES game, and Turtlemania in general. I enjoyed the original comic book series and most of the things that followed, especially the video games and the 1990 feature film.

Notable Quotable:

"This is one of the few games which is very faithful to its source material *and* lots of fun!" —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"The absence of a multi-player option detracts from the whole concept of Turtle togetherness, the overall action is just average, and it's nearly impossible to finish with only two continues. Also, although the Turtles look cool, the Foot Clanners' graphics are a little weak." —*GamePro* (March 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The controls in *TMNT* are too jerky and it quickly becomes difficult to control your characters. The scrolling also hinders the game by placing you in vulnerable positions. The intermissions are cool, but the rest of the cart is a disappointment." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1989)

Notable Quotable:

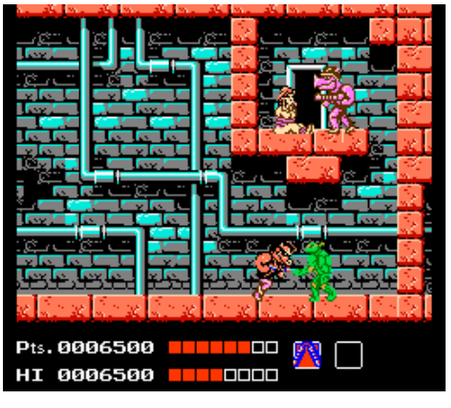
"I was pleasantly surprised to find a good game lurking behind all the hype: this is a genuinely original and interesting product. The graphics are excellent, if somewhat on the small side, and the soundtrack is fairly close to the theme music. The four amphibians come across as being different, each having its own abilities and weak points . . . a very playable game." —*Mean Machines* (October 1990)

Notable Quotable:

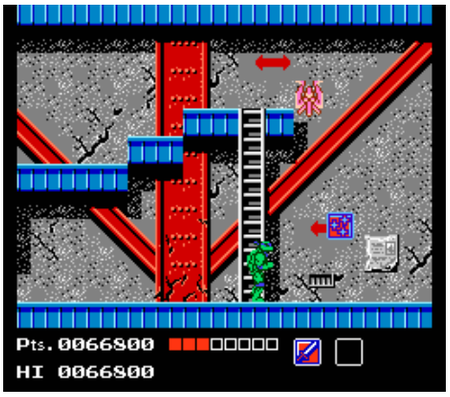
"Super exciting music and good sound effects. The graphics show an abundance of detail, and the realistic size of the enemies makes them easy to identify and fun to fight. The animation is superb . . . Exemplifies the best for the NES. Topnotch graphics, sound, and fierce action combine for superb play value. And it's hard enough to keep even the best players occupied for a long time." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

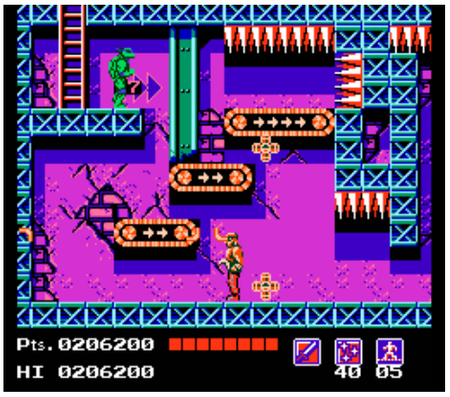
Notable Quotable:

"Konami could not have created a more difficult game targeted at eight-year-olds than *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* . . . Enemies attack en masse and you're sure to take at least one hit. Health regenerating pizzas are rare, and even if you've mastered the majority of the game, the final battle inside the Technodrome is ridiculous. That's assuming you can get past an underwater maze littered with time sensitive bombs, killer seaweed, and loose collision detection." —Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING





Insider Insight: Being born in the mid-'80s, I was the prime target for the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles franchise once it morphed into an animated series and toy line that was more palatable to kids than the gritty comic book made by Eastman and Laird. My room was filled with TMNT figures and vehicles, I carried my money around in a Turtles wallet, and of course I was overjoyed when the Heroes in a Half Shell finally came to my NES.

I rented *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* from Dexter's Video, a store across the street from my grandmother's house. Whether it was simply my loyalty to the brand or because I was happy enough to just be playing a TMNT game, I never once called it a bad game growing up, even though I was bad at it and could only get as far as the second open area after the dreaded dam level.

After years of watching videos from the likes of the Angry Video Game Nerd and Dorkly riffing on *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, though they are hilarious, I decided in late 2015 that I wanted to see *Turtles* through to the very end. I spent nights playing the game, studying strategies online, and learning when to use each character until one night I finally defeated Shredder. This was a feat in which I once called a friend a liar when he claimed he had done it when he was a kid.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles isn't a perfect game, but it's not as bad as the internet will have you believe. Like *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest*, it tries to be something more than just another action/platformer or brawler, giving the player a small open world to explore while balancing a few different gameplay types from swimming, to action, and driving around in the Party Wagon. Is it without problems? Far from it, but it's certainly not bad. —Blair Farrell, creator of Comic Gamers Assemble (comicgamersassemble.com), author of *The Web of Spider-Man Games: The Amazing and the (Not So) Spectacular*

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Arcade Game

PUBLISHER: Ultra Games.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

There's no four-player mode like in the arcades, but this is nevertheless an excellent port of Konami's classic coin-op beat-'em-up, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1989). It even features two new levels and some additional enemies, including a flying rendition of Baxter Stockman. Gameplay is somewhat similar to *Double Dragon*, with players running, jumping, and attacking their way through April's Hot Midtown Loft, Times Square, the SoHo Sewer System, Snowy Central Park, Vinnie's Valet Parking Garage, Madison Square Avenue, Rock-A-Fella Expressway, Rock Quarry Factory, House of Shogun, and Technodrome. Michelangelo wields nunchakus, Raphael fights with dual sai daggers, Donatello battles using a bo, and Leonardo carries katana blades. They do a lot of jump kicks as well. They use these weapons and moves to battle such baddies as Tubular Transport (mosquito-like helicopter), Frosty the Hit Man, Roadkill Rodney (unicycle soldier), Foot Soldier, Vincent Van Growl (tiger), Stone Warrior, and others, including bosses Professor Baxter Stockman, Krang, Rocksteady, Bebop, and Shredder.

Notable Quotable:

"Stupendous graphics, music, and sound effects . . . Ultra has come as close to making a real arcade quality game for Nintendo as any player could wish for . . . action packed . . . the constant button action will put a serious hurt on your hands. The better your reflexes the quicker you'll progress." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

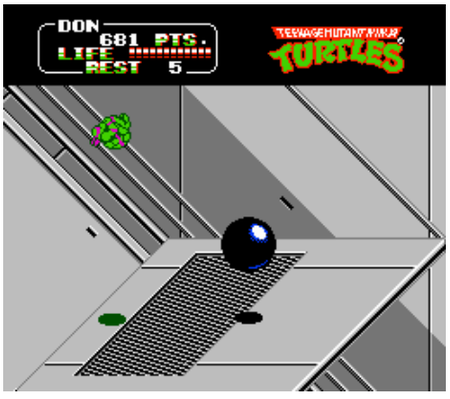
Notable Quotable:

"Not as much fun as the original, where the Turtles were more compact and tougher. The cast of characters is not as diverse as they might have been and the bosses, though challenging, are much too similar . . . there's a lot of image breakup when figures overlap, such as in the Stockman phase of scene two." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games 4* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1991)

Insider Insight: My parents gifted me *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Arcade Game* on Christmas Eve 1990 to keep my brother and I occupied as they prepared for the party they were hosting that night. Their plan worked gloriously, as we ended up playing all day, eventually beating it right before the party started. When our cousins came over that night they begged us to let them play, but since we'd been playing it for the last eight-plus hours we wanted to play something else. Well that started a huge fight and we began screaming at each other, eventually requiring our parents to intervene. Sadly, they took the NES away since we couldn't agree on a solution. We thought the night was lost, but I had a plan. I dug my dad's Atari 2600 out of the closet and we ended up playing *Warlords*. If you've ever played *Warlords*, you'll understand that the frantic action of a four-player battle resulted in even more fighting, which ultimately resulted in the Atari 2600 being taken away as well. —Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com

Insider Insight: As a child I liked the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles even more than video games. I owned a multitude of the figurines,

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



vehicle toys, posters, bedsheets, videos—virtually anything that had the turtles on it, I had to have. Imagine my surprise and delight when the multiplayer beat-'em-up showed up in arcades and later made its way home to the NES. I must've played and beat this one with my sister about every other weekend.

Of course we would use the stage select/nine lives code (BABAUDBALRBA+Start on the title screen), but it was the only way we were ever able to make any progress. I remember a neighbor had us all but CONVINCED that you could do a glitch at the end of the game that would take you to a special area filled with extra-tough enemies. This ended up being untrue, but we would try over and over again, assuming we just weren't quick enough to get it. Whether he knew it was false or if he was also convinced it was true is a mystery for the ages. —Danny Mattice, Youtube and Twitch personality

Insider Insight: I received my copy of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Arcade Game* back in 1990 for my ninth birthday. I remember the feeling I felt unwrapping the game and how excited I was to plug it in and play it. This is because *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* by Konami in the arcade (released a year earlier) was and still is one of my favorite all time coin-op games. The graphics and sprites were on point, and as a huge fan of the animated series I felt like I was playing the cartoon. When I heard that Ultra Games/Konami was porting the game to the NES I knew I had to own it.

The game certainly doesn't disappoint, and to make it even more awesome, the NES port features two additional stages and new enemies. I quickly learned how to master the jump attack (pressing A and B at the same time) and in doing so mow down Foot Clan enemies in one fell swoop. It's a game I still enjoy playing today, and I thought it was cool that it featured Pizza Hut in-game advertising as well as a Pizza Hut coupon. —John Lester, "Gamester81" on YouTube, cofounder of Game On Expo

SCHIFFER

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III: The Manhattan Project

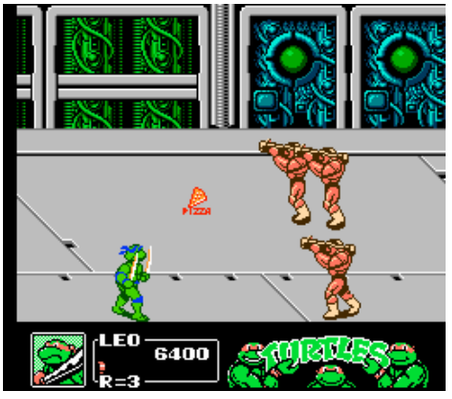
PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

The Heroes in a Half Shell return for a third outing on the NES. As with the first two games, the excellent *TMNT III* lets you control each of the famous, ninjitsu-trained, anthropomorphic turtles. However, this time out they each have their own moves (in addition to their own weaponry). Leonardo has a cyclone sword spin, Raphael pulls off a power drill attack, Michelangelo executes a kangaroo kick, and Donatello does a knockout roll. Standard moves include flying flip jump, flying ninja kick, jab & toss, and get loose (for shaking free of a biting Mouser or an arms-pinning Foot Soldier). The Turtles must run, jump, and battle their way through eight levels: Ft. Slaughterdale Beach, The Typhoon Tidal Pool, Brooklyn Bridge is Falling Down, Welcome to the Jungle (garages, subways, alleys), The Sewer Pipe Nightmare, The Technodrome, Vertigo Point Tower, and Krang's Spaceship. Watch out for obstacles such as deadly pits, falling weights, and giant cannon balls. Most of the action is beat-'em-up, but in the Typhoon Tidal Pool level (which is also side-scrolling) you ride a jet-powered surfboard while warding off Foot Soldiers.

Notable Quotable:
"Imagine *Final Fight* but with a faster pace . . . fuller experience than *TMNT II* . . . levels are much more dynamic . . . suffers from slowdown when there are more than three enemies on the screen at once . . . As for the music, it is typical Konami flair: upbeat, addicting, and mood setting." —Matt McLennan (www.pixlbit.com)

Notable Quotable:
"This latest Turtles title does pack a punch, but there are some shortcomings. The flicker problem that plagued the second adventure turns up again in part three. Overall, however, there is a lot to like in this game, which retains the action approach of part two and combines it with the adventure of the original." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"While *TMNT III* builds on the walk-and-brawl design of the Turtles' arcade hit, it's a wholly original work designed specifically for the NES. It borrows several elements from the second coin-op title, *Turtles in Time*, while reworking them into all new experiences . . . one of the best cooperative brawlers on NES . . . some of the finest visuals and music ever experienced on the console. Like all brawlers it does get pretty repetitive . . . the potential for fast-paced two-turtle teamwork keeps the pace so snappy that you barely even notice the fact that you've just punched your hundredth Foot Soldier." —Polygon (www.polygon.com), which ranked *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III* the 31st-greatest NES game



Insider Insight: Most kids my age loved the Ninja Turtles and we all fell head over heels for the first arcade game. So when *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II* came out on the NES I was super excited to play it. When I finally did, it just didn't feel right. It was one of the first times I remember feeling really let down by a game.

When *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III* was set to follow I wasn't sure how badly I wanted to play it, since I felt a bit let down by the second game. My friend Bryan got the game and I borrowed it from him with low expectations. After playing it for a while, though, I found myself enjoying the game much more than I had expected. Everything looked and sounded great, and it played extremely well. Best of all was that each of the turtles had his own special moves.

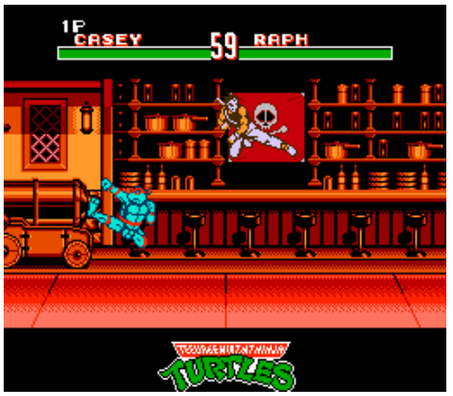
The one thing I didn't like about the original arcade game and something that always bothered me about *TMNT II* is that it didn't feel like it mattered which turtle you picked because they played roughly the same. Here, you at least had to factor in different strategies in picking which turtle to control. Not having anything to live up to also helped with my assessment of *TMNT III*, since I wasn't comparing it to a superior version from the arcades.

I recently played the game through to the end for the first time in well over 15 years, and I feel the same about it now as I did then. Playing something that's fun that also brings back a flood of joyful memories is why I love retro gaming. – John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Tournament Fighters

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1–4 players (2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles return to the NES once again. However, *Tournament Fighters* eschews the side-scrolling formula of the first three games in the series in favor of one-on-one *Street Fighter II*–style fighting, which is an unusual genre for the NES done surprisingly well here. In Story mode players select a turtle hero for use in fighting Casey Jones (who wields a golf club), Hot Head, Shredder, and the other three turtles. As TMNT veterans know the turtles consist of Michelangelo, Raphael, Donatello, and Leonardo. VS Player and VS CPU let gamers select any character for battling a friend or the computer (respectively), while Tournament mode lets one to four players (two at a time) fight as any of the seven characters. Each combatant has a variety of punches and kicks, along with such special moves as fire breath, explosion punch, tornado-spinning kick, or heel drop. For reasons I can't fathom, the turtles lack their patented weaponry, which is unfortunate in an otherwise stellar game. A late NES release, *Tournament Fighters* is very hard to find.

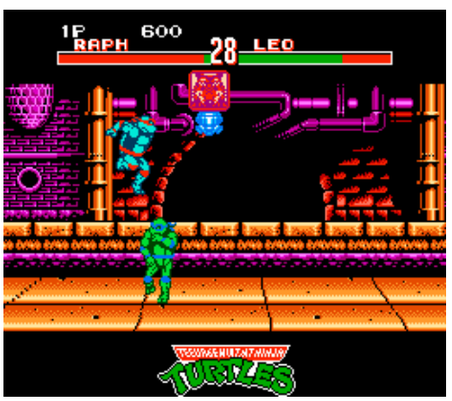
Memories: I discovered the Ninja Turtles in 1984 in the original black-and-white Mirage comic books created by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird, a few years before the Archie comics, cartoons, action figures, movies, and Turtles craze in general. I've enjoyed most of the video games, but *Tournament Fighters* is clearly much better on the Super Nintendo, which is no surprise.

Notable Quotable:

"Konami's latest dip into the sewers of Manhattan produces a workable NES fight, but it comes up a tad murky. Yanking the Turtles' weapons definitely makes them lose some bite. Either ya gotta love them Turtles or you must really need a NES fight to get into this cart." —*GamePro* (December 1993)

Notable Quotable:

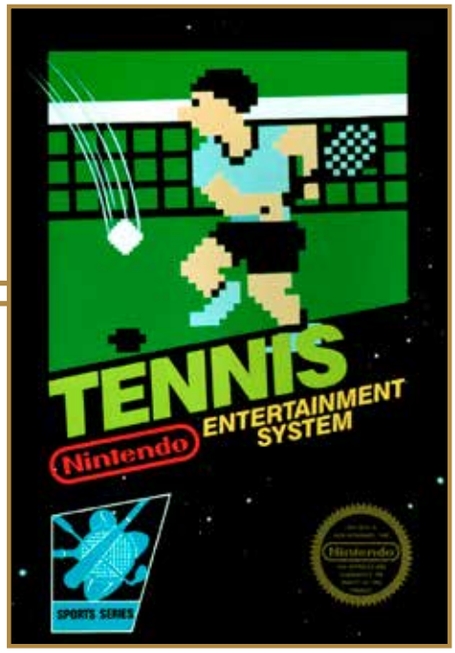
"The NES has a serious lack of buttons for a true fighting game, but considering the limitation it works out well . . . The bouts have a decent speed when the game is set to turbo . . . a baffling lack of combos to be had, a two-hitter being the highlight . . . the colors are bright. The Turtles are almost entirely green, save for their bandana and pads. The other three characters look great, especially Hothead, who is a very large, well animated sprite. There are some major flicker issues at times, but these hardly detract from one of the better looking games on the console . . . there is some voice work, though it's mostly unintelligible." —Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)



© SCHAEFER PUBLISHING

Tennis

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Tennis, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1985.



Launching alongside the NES console, *Tennis* was a nice upgrade from tennis games for previous consoles, giving players a cartoonish, but relatively authentic version of the popular sport. Viewed from behind (and a little above) the end of the court, the game offers the basic rules of standard tennis and two game modes: Singles and Doubles. Types of hits you can perform include serve, smash, forehand, backhand, forehand volley, backhand volley, forehand lob, and backhand lob. The first to win six games wins the set, while winning two out of three sets wins the match. The court is small, the players move quickly, and you can select your computer opponent's skill level: beginner, intermediate, or champion. It's cool that Mario sits perched atop the official's chair, turning his head back and forth and calling the game via word balloons. It's not cool that the two-player mode is only co-op against the computer—you can't challenge a human opponent!

Memories: *Tennis* opens with the same music as three other NES sports titles: *Baseball*, *Pro Wrestling*, and *Volleyball*. Imagine the hate that would be thrown at Nintendo if they did something similar today—social media wouldn't stand for it!

Notable Quotable:
"Simulates three-dimensional space quite well . . . Characters are well animated and the typical tennis player's movements have been captured well in the graphics . . . The game looks and plays very well." —*Computer Entertainer* (May 1986)

Notable Quotable:
"When a ball is approaching your player constantly switches between the forehand and backhand position, which makes it difficult to line up correctly prior to a swing. This affects the action, as you'll often miss, or end up with the ball hitting your player! Placing shots is tough too, as the timing of your swing dictates where the ball will travel; it's awkward to become accustomed to, especially if you're used to holding a direction on the controller. Due to how little control you have over shot location it does feel more like a glorified version of *Pong* rather than a tennis simulation . . . Serving is the only part that's well implemented, and I like how there's a secret fast serve which rewards skillful play by achieving perfect timing. My favorite part of the game is the strangely aggressive CPU player who frequently charges the net with his racket cocked!" —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

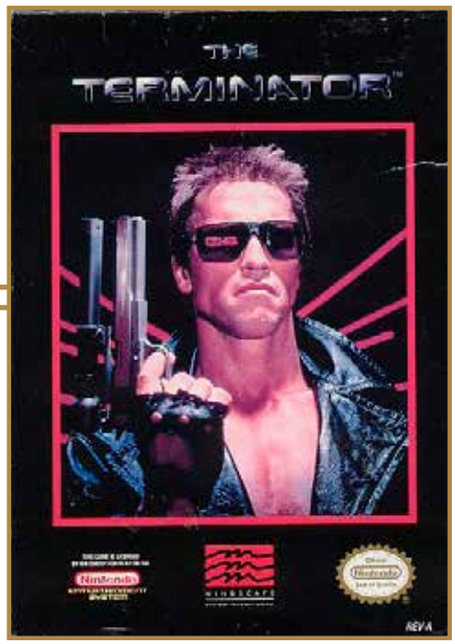
Insider Insight: Throughout this book I've written a lot about my next door neighbor Martin, that one kid I knew with an NES. One thing I haven't mentioned is that Martin was a very good amateur tennis player. He was part of a highly regarded local tennis club and regularly competed in tournaments across the country, so it stands to reason that he would be interested in owning tennis based video games.

At the time the unoriginally named *Tennis* was the only game of its type available on the NES in the UK, so it didn't leave Martin with much of a choice. It was one of the first games he purchased for the system and we ended up being pleasantly surprised by it. At first, however, the simple graphics, lack of options, and absence of licensing made it seem like it was barely a step up from Activision's *Tennis* on the Atari 2600, which was fun but primitive.

Activision's *Tennis* was popular because it was both fast and fun to play, which was also true for the NES game. And upon further inspection, I realized there were plenty of improvements as well. The graphics were obviously better, as was the sound, but perhaps the most remarkable new feature was the addition of an umpire. Not just any old umpire, either—it was Mario himself calling the points! And what's this? A doubles mode? That was awesome, too! —Kieren Hawken, an Englishman who has been writing about video games for 15 years

The Terminator

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



Inspired by the excellent 1984 feature film, *The Terminator* casts players in the role of Kyle Reese, who must journey back to our time to protect Sarah Connor, mother of John Connor, future leader of the resistance movement against the machines. Reese begins in the future (a departure from the movie), trying to find Skynet's time displacement equipment to follow the Terminator back to 1984. He must also find Sarah, escape from the police station, avoid a motorcycle-riding Terminator, and destroy the Terminator under a compressor. What all this amounts to is a lot of running, jumping (on blocks, pipes, and other bland platforms), climbing ladders, avoiding drips of slime, and shooting such enemies as evil soldiers, automated guns, and Terminators. When he doesn't have a gun Reese must punch, kick, and throw baseballs at enemies. He can also use grenades, and in certain areas he will drive a truck (side-scrolling) and a getaway vehicle (overhead view). Reese squats when he jumps, creating an annoying delay, and he can't shoot while jumping, putting unnecessary restraints on the gameplay. Reese will fall right through the edges of certain platforms, leading to his death. Hit detection is also questionable, as your bullets will go right through some enemies. The six-level game is short, but brutally difficult—it desperately needs continues. Poor music and a limited color palette add to the misery.

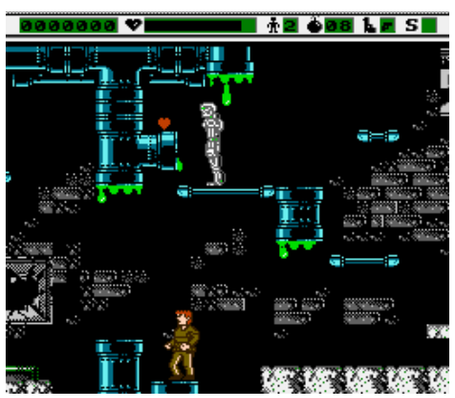
Memories: *The Terminator* is now a major franchise, but when the original low budget film hit theaters to little fanfare in 1984, my friend and I had barely heard of it. The premise sounded cool, though, so we went to see it at the local mall. Not expecting much, we were blown away by the film, and today it remains one of my favorite movies of the 1980s. Unfortunately the NES game, like *Predator*, *Rambo*, *Total Recall*, and so many others, takes an excellent action film and turns it into an execrable video game. Fortunately, when the game came out, I had the good sense to rent it instead of purchasing.

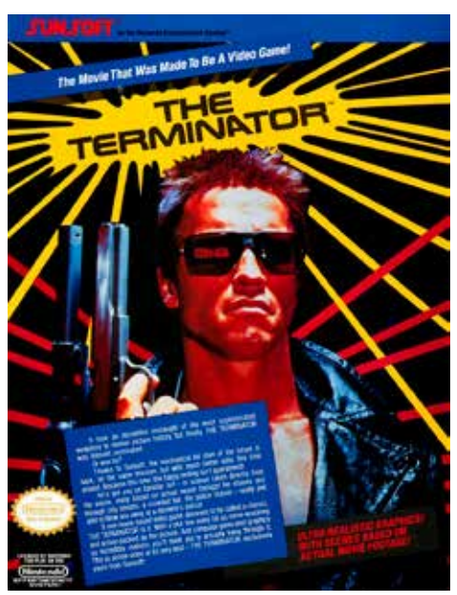
Notable Quotable:

"The controls are awkward, and the variety of enemies was too lacking to keep my attention. Forget the sound, I just turn it off. I like the idea, and if it were solid, it would be hot. My favorite feature is the gun angle control to blast away Arnold!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"If you played this game you're probably traumatized . . . This is what you call 8-bit barf . . . The backgrounds are just a random mishmash of gray bricks. It's so depressing to look at . . . The music is unacceptable . . . a five-second loop that repeats . . . There aren't many sound effects, either, so it really fails in the auditory department . . . an awe inspiring joke of legendary bad game design. It's almost as bad as *Wizard of Oz* [for the SNES]." —The Angry Video Game Nerd (YouTube)





© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Terminator 2: Judgment Day

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

In *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, an advanced, shape-shifting Terminator called the T-1000 is trying to kill a 10-year-old John Connor, and it is up to you, in the role of a reprogrammed T-800, to save him. Armed with a 10-guage shotgun and the ability to run, jump, kneel, punch, and ride elevators, you must battle enemies at a parking lot and truck stop; rescue Sarah Connor from the state hospital (without killing human opponents); destroy Cyberdyne Systems (by setting charges and moving 10 barrels of explosives to various sections of a building); and battle the T-1000 atop a steel mill. Deviating from the other four levels, level two puts you on a Harley, driving through a drainage canal (viewed from an isometric perspective), avoiding obstacles and debris while shooting openings in gates and shooting and outracing the T-1000, who gives chase in a big rig tow truck. Based on the terrific 1991 action/science fiction film.

Notable Quotable:

"With a story that follows the movie's plot *T2* is a fun game to watch. However, the play quality is not as good as it could have been because the collision counter is very inaccurate. If you can overcome this handicap, however, then try this game." —*Game Zero* (August 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"I did enjoy playing *T2* . . . It's nothing new or innovative; in fact, it's for the most part just a fairly straightforward platform shoot/beat-'em-up, but a reasonably enjoyable one . . . Graphically the game is reminiscent of *Star Wars* . . . very high quality sprites and excellent animation throughout . . . pleasantly surprised by the sound, which includes some great tunes . . . While the beat-'em-up fare becomes a tad repetitive, you find yourself wanting to get a bit farther with each game." —*Computer and Video Games* (February 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"After playing for several hours I couldn't even get past the second stage. The first stage is tough, but not impossible . . . It's the second stage that—at least for me, a seasoned NES veteran who has defeated about 100 games—can be impassable. As you drive the motorcycle up a diagonally tilted screen the T1000 chases you in control of an 18-wheeler. It's up to you to shoot the vehicle so that he stays behind as you try to dodge road debris and anything else that may get in your way. If you figure out how to do this successfully please let me know. I think I may have survived for as long as 30 to 45 seconds at a time, but even that kind of success was rare . . . Perhaps the difficulty of the game would have been less frustrating without having to battle through the first stage every time." —Christopher Michael Baker (formerly at allgame.com)

Insider Insight: I'm strolling through Toys "R" Us, my mind awash in possibilities. It's a few days before my thirteenth birthday, and my mom has given me permission to pick out a combination of NES and Game Boy games in honor of my big day. I select the no brainers first, *Mega Man: Dr. Wily's Revenge* and *Mega Man II* for Game Boy. Both had been on my radar for quite some time. The final selection is a bit of a wildcard, but after careful deliberation I set my sights on *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* for the NES. While I hadn't heard much about the game I was blown away by *T2* in the theater the previous summer, so by my nearly teenaged logic the melding of one of my favorite movies with my favorite console would undoubtedly yield a slam dunk of Jordanesque proportions.

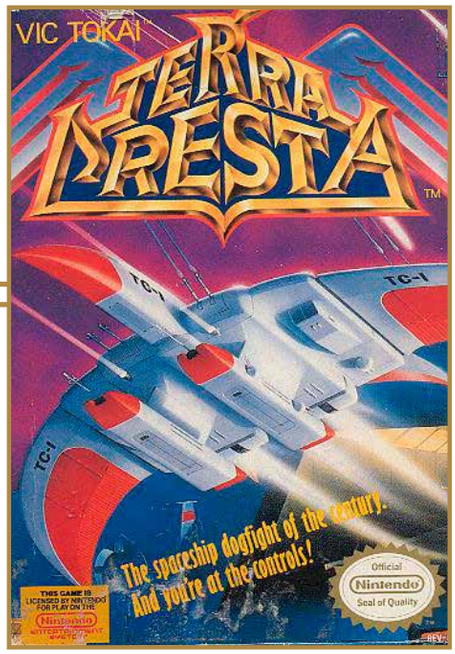
The morning of my birthday rolls around and I am on a mission. I had spent the few days prior steadily progressing deep into the game and now the end is nearly in sight. Shortly after the first of my friends arrives for the afternoon's festivities it is showdown time. Me and the T-1000, face to liquid metal face. As it turns out, the platforming required to reach my last foe was far more difficult than the actual final encounter and I dispatch him with relative ease while my friend, David, observes. A triumphant start to what is still one of the most memorable birthday celebrations that I've ever had.

While the game itself didn't have the same lasting impression on me that the film did, it will always hold a special place in my heart for playing a key part in that wonderful day and for being one of the last birthday gifts that I ever received from my mom. —Matt Miller, video game world record holder, one-half of Team Mayh3m, featured in the *Nintendo Quest* documentary

SOMA PUBLISHING

Terra Cresta

PUBLISHER: Vik Tokai.
DEVELOPER: Nihon Bussan.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1990.



The sequel to *Moon Cresta* (Nichibutsu, 1980), which was a fixed screen shooter, *Terra Cresta* is a nice port of Nihon Bussan's 1985 arcade game. The shooting action is similar to *Xevious*, in that you fly over land and sea, firing at airborne and ground-based enemies. However, it adds to the formula by letting you shoot numbered icons that reveal five different ship parts that you equip on your plane. As you gain parts your plane gets bigger and more powerful, with such added weapons as dual firing, backward shooting, and a shield at the back of the ship. Collecting all five parts temporarily transforms the ship into an invulnerable phoenix that can crash into enemies with impunity. Enemies to destroy include dragons, devils, mines, high speed boats, floatable guard guns, moveable fortresses, and more. A special and unusual Design mode, which wasn't in the coin-op game, lets you predetermine parts position and beam shooting direction. Featuring fast, smooth, and simple, yet challenging gameplay, this is one of the better vertical shooters of the 8-bit era.

Memories: I discovered *Moon Cresta* at The Land of Oz arcade at the North East Mall in North Richland Hills, Texas, back in 1980, when it came out. I thoroughly enjoyed it as an alternative to *Space Invaders*, which I had played to death at that point. I don't recall seeing *Terra Cresta* in the arcades, and I don't remember seeing the *Terra Cresta* NES cartridge for sale in stores when it was new. These days both the arcade cab and cartridge are hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"I love a good shooter, and *Terra Cresta* does a pretty good job covering all the bases. There are intense shootouts, some unique power-up techniques, and big bosses. The graphics could have been better, but gameplay is decent." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1990)

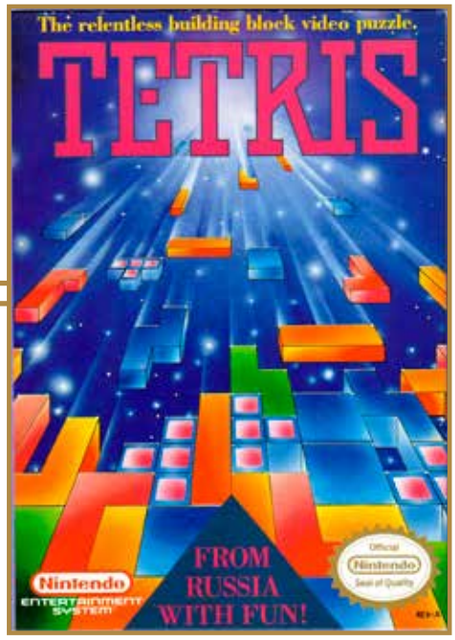
Notable Quotable:

"This conversion of *Terra Cresta* is fairly close to the original arcade game. Some visual effects (such as the way power-up containers 'zoom' into existence) have obviously been omitted and all the boss battles are set against a plain black background. The original arcade game also featured digitized/sampled sound effects which were, unsurprisingly, removed from the 8-bit conversion." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tetris (Nintendo)

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.

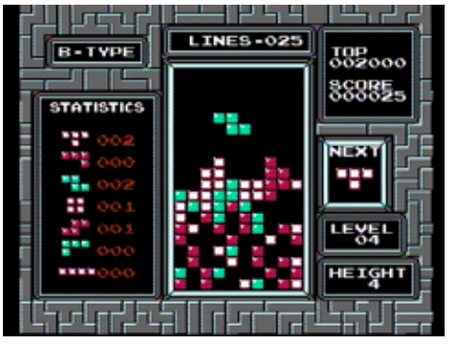


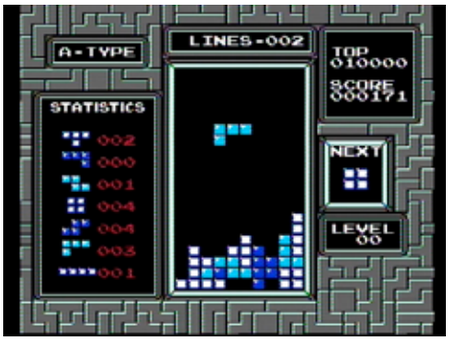
Alexey Pazhitnov's famous and highly influential "falling block" computer puzzler comes to the NES. The game has players manipulating seven different types of blocks that descend, one at a time, down the playfield. The blocks can be rotated and moved right and left. The objective is to piece them together to form horizontal lines. When an unbroken line is formed it disappears, clearing up space. If the blocks pile up to the top of the screen the game will end. Clearing two to four rows at once gives players extra points. Mode A is an endurance test in which players try to complete as many lines as possible while mode B is a contest to complete 25 lines. *Tetris* is great in most any form, but the Nintendo version lacks the two-player simultaneous mode found in the Tengen release. Regardless it is endlessly entertaining, and it is easier to find than the Tengen game.

Memories: In 1993, I sold my 50% share of Fantastic Comics & Cards, a two-store chain in the Fort Worth, Texas, area, to my brother-in-law and business partner Michael Davis, the other co-owner of the retail establishment. I decided to take a three-month vacation prior to looking for another job (which ended up being as a receiving clerk at Waldenbooks). Instead of taking a trip or something I got up each morning and wrote short stories, as I was an aspiring fiction writer at the time. After lunch I'd play three or four hours of *Tetris* on the NES. I got thoroughly addicted and really good at the game, but I decided to take a break from *Tetris* altogether after one evening when I was driving into downtown Fort Worth and envisioned large buildings dropping from the sky to fit alongside the Fort Worth buildings so they could disappear. There's got to be a name for this type of hallucination. Maybe "Tetrisight?"

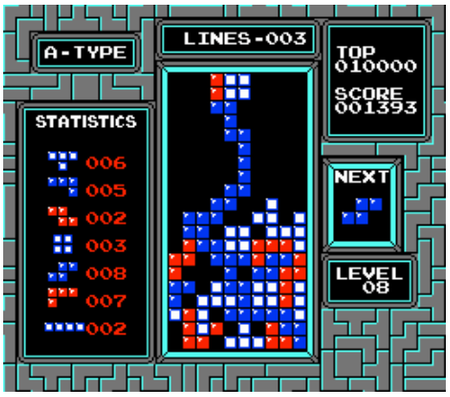
Notable Quotable:
"*Tetris* is the perfect video game . . . a minute to learn and a lifetime to master . . . The sense of genuine closure that is provided when a player slides one of those straight pieces into a slot that simultaneously clears out a quartet of rows is hard to match." — *Video Game Collector* #10 (Summer 2008)

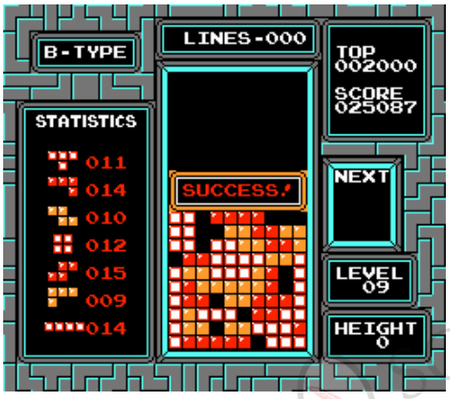
Notable Quotable:
"The Nintendo version probably has the edge in terms of single player action. The blocks are bigger, the controls are more precise, and the music is better . . . lacks a two-player mode, and for the life of me I have no idea why they didn't include one. My friend Brent is a *Tetris* master (no joke) and he strongly favors this Nintendo edition (although he admits nostalgia may be a factor). Personally I think it's pretty much a draw." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

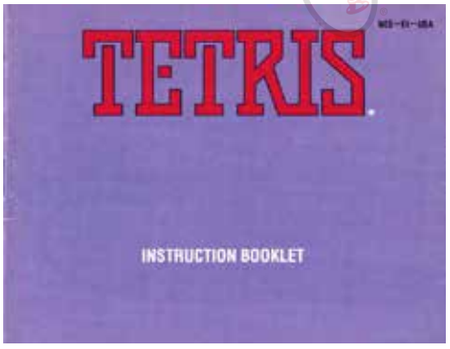


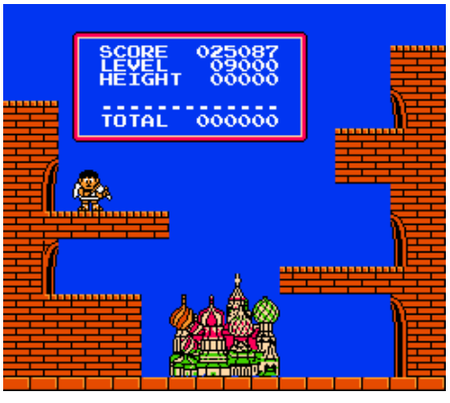


SCHIFFER PUBLISHING









Insider Insight: When we were kids my brothers, sister, and I enjoyed gaming on the NES, Super NES, Game Boy, TurboGrafx-16, Nintendo 64, and GameCube. We spent countless days together and with our friends bonding over a mutual love of virtual worlds. My parents, on the other hand, could not understand gaming and didn't care much for it. When it came to *Tetris*, though, things were different. The game was a regular fixture in our house. My mom enjoyed it, and my dad spent hours and hours finding new strategies. Sometimes I would watch him so I could try and learn and apply his techniques. I was nowhere near as good as him, but he was patient and spent a lot of time teaching me how to play from the time I was five years old. It became a form of father-son bonding.

While my dad remains a fan of the game, he dislikes every iteration except for Nintendo's on the NES. He rejected the Tengen release completely, and while I think it's a fine game in its own right, I agree that nothing tops Nintendo's version. I inherited a love of *Tetris* from my dad and still apply what he taught me whenever I play any form of the game, such as *Puyo Puyo Tetris*. There is something so basic and yet perfect about *Tetris* that you cannot help but appreciate how good it is. The different music options are great as well—I found myself drawn to the 8-bit rendition of "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairies." I have played this game nearly my entire life and I will never get tired of it. —Jon Balofsky, who has written about video games for outlets such as Playeressence, Shigeru News, Real Otaku Gamer, and Indie Gamer Team

Insider Insight: After attending a number of gaming events over the years I have found that there are a handful of questions that routinely come up during casual conversation. One that has always intrigued me is the infamous, "If you had to spend the remainder of your days on a deserted island and could only bring one game along to help pass the time, what would it be?" After putting way more thought into the question than it probably warrants, my choice would be NES *Tetris*.

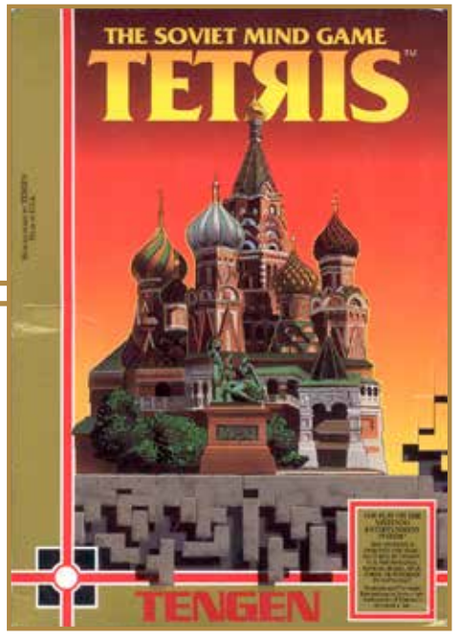
Like many, my introduction to *Tetris* was via the pack-in cartridge for the inaugural Game Boy release and it was love at first play. Since then I have played many different iterations of *Tetris* across myriad platforms, but the NES version published by Nintendo is the one to which I return most frequently. Between the challenge level, the classic style, and the timeless music, it's an imminently re-playable game. As for the "deserted island" scenario noted above NES *Tetris* would be an ideal choice, as you can play the game a thousand times and never have a repeat performance due to the varied piece distribution. Each game played is a unique experience unto itself.

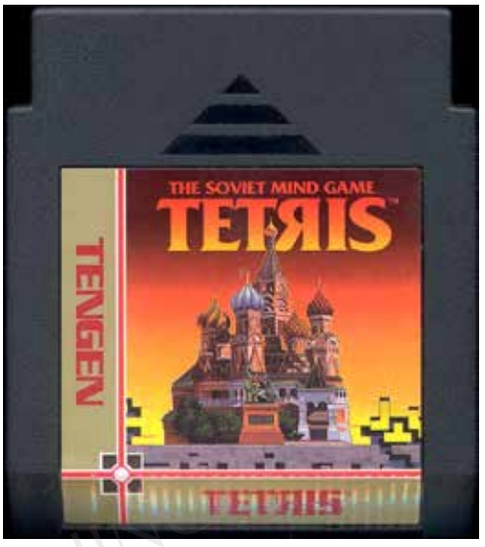
Beyond the sheer stylistic enjoyment and replay value, NES *Tetris* has also had a profound influence on my personal development, for across the broad spectrum of video games that I have played throughout the past four decades it is the one, in my estimation, that best represents the human experience. Specifically, the core challenge of the game is to take the pieces that you are dealt and make them quickly fit in the best possible manner. How you choose to place your pieces has a direct impact on how difficult it will be to keep the game progressing forward. Much in the same way life presents each of us with unexpected obstacles and choices, and depending on the quality of our respective decision making, the path forward either becomes smoother or more turbulent. —Matt Miller, video game world record holder, one-half of Team Mayh3m, featured in the Nintendo Quest documentary

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tetris (Tengen)

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Tengen.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.





The same year Nintendo brought *Tetris* to the NES, Tengen released this unlicensed version of the game. It is based on the 1988 Atari Games arcade version and has features not found in the Nintendo rendition, including two-player split screen action (cooperative or competitive). Players can even handicap games or play against the computer. Objectives include achieving the highest score or racing to eliminate a set number of lines, with or without a time limit. Graphically, the blocks are shaded like their arcade counterparts. In the Nintendo version the blocks appear flat. Nintendo sued Atari and won (Tengen is Atari's publisher for NES games), forcing this cartridge off the market and making it relatively scarce.

Memories: Despite the hoopla surrounding the two-player modes in the Tengen version of *Tetris*, I've always preferred the Nintendo-branded cart, as I like the smoother controls. I enjoy two-player puzzle games such as *Tetris Attack* and *Super Puzzle Fighter*, but I've always considered the original *Tetris* to be a sublime solo experience.

Notable Quotable:
"Almost everyone agrees that Tengen's version of the game was far superior to Nintendo's, even including a two-player mode that Nintendo's version sorely lacked. Today Tengen *Tetris* is a rare title to have in your collection, but it's a worthwhile play." —Sam Claiborn (ign.com)

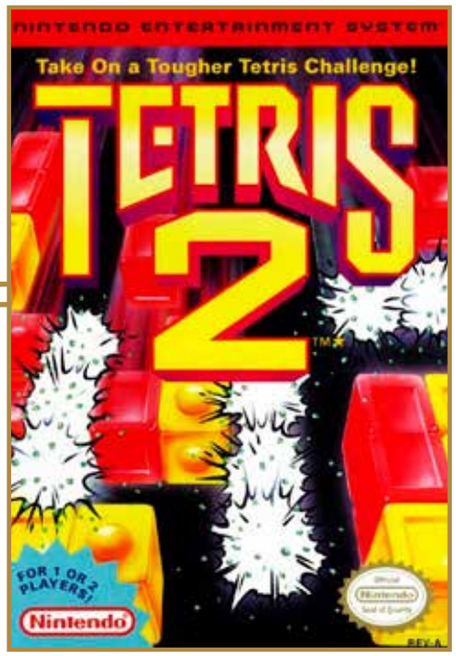
Notable Quotable:
"The single-player game plays quite different [than the Nintendo version]. The buttons only rotate the pieces in one direction and the controls are quite stiff in comparison. However, the stiffness reminds me more of playing the computer versions, just with a controller instead of a keyboard. The levels require 30 lines to advance, so the challenge is more about managing the playfield rather than ever-increasing speeds . . . Nintendo's take on the game is much more polished . . . The Tengen version of *Tetris* has given me extra features I never knew I really wanted, but I think it's great that they're there . . . Tengen's *Tetris* is the superior version." —Joe Goes Retro (YouTube)

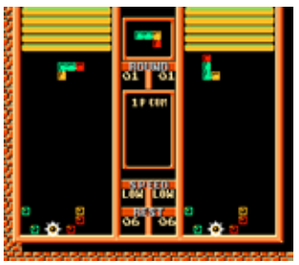
Notable Quotable:
"Many gamers swear up and down that this is the superior *Tetris*, but it's really not so cut and dry. Tengen's *Tetris* makes a better first impression with a vibrant title screen showing St. Basil's Cathedral and colorful fireworks . . . but there are some minor flaws. The statistics area encroaches onto the playing field and it's hard to see the 'next piece' in the top corner. The pieces are smaller than the Nintendo version but bolder in color. Unfortunately, when a piece drops into place, it turns the same color as the whole mass and I don't like that . . . there are some subtle 'rotation positioning' quirks that casual players will definitely not notice but experts probably will. The two-player head-to-head mode is what makes this edition so attractive . . . Tengen's *Tetris* offers more razzle dazzle than Nintendo, but I'm not convinced it's a better all-around game." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tetris 2

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.





As with most *Tetris* sequels, *Tetris 2* consists of blocks falling from the top of the screen, one after another. In the original *Tetris* the object is to arrange the blocks in unbroken horizontal lines, effectively erasing them from the screen. This game, however, features red, green, and yellow blocks, and you must align three or more blocks of the same color vertically or horizontally to erase them from the screen. The game, which evokes *Dr. Mario*, ends when the blocks pile up to the top of the screen. *Tetris 2* features a simultaneous two-player mode wherein you challenge either the computer or an opponent. The object of the game is similar to the one-player mode, but you win by either making all the blocks on your screen vanish, or when the blocks on your opponent's field of play stack all the way to the top. The first player to win three games wins the match. An added challenge in *Tetris 2* is the addition of fixed blocks and flash blocks (the latter are also called bombs). These blocks are already present on the play field when you begin a game. In the one-player game, if you eliminate a flash block, all blocks of the same color will vanish from the screen. If you erase all flash blocks all fixed blocks will vanish, moving you forward to the next level. In the competitive mode, eliminating a flash block drops your opponent's ceiling by one line, making his or her game more difficult. Each time you create a chain reaction your opponent's blocks will temporarily fall faster. The two-player mode is easily the best thing about this game. It is highly competitive and the strategies you can use on each other are varied and fun.

Memories: I enjoy *Tetris 2*, probably more than most gamers I know, but I didn't play it until I discovered the superior Super Nintendo version at FuncoLand during the late 1990s. The store near my house had a stack of factory sealed copies left over from when they were new (perhaps it was a back room or warehouse find) so I bought one. I still have that copy, since I rarely sell anything in my personal collection.

Notable Quotable:

"It's got bombs, all right—a great big one that goes off when you first hit the power switch. This is truly a disappointing attempt for puzzle fans who have patiently waited for this sequel." —*Game Players* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"For a sequel *Tetris 2* is pretty good, but the first one still rules. The new gameplay, two-player simultaneous, and the bombs thrown into the playfield are a nice touch, but something seemed to be missing. Unlike the first, I didn't find myself wanting to keep playing. The graphics and sound were okay." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1993)

Insider Insight: "RRRAAAA, *Tetris* 2!!!" is what I hear every time I think about this wonderful little action puzzler. Back when the game was first released Nintendo made a commercial for it that I kept seeing during my Saturday morning cartoons. They really wanted to drive home the point that this time it had bombs, and they did so by having various people yell "*Tetris* 2!" and then explode. About halfway through the commercial a parrot yelled "RRRAAAA, *Tetris* 2!!!" before exploding in a cloud of feathers, and I could not stop laughing.

When I finally convinced my parents to buy it for me, I was surprised to find that the game itself was devoid of any sense of humor. Still, I thoroughly enjoyed my time with it. It has a nice soundtrack and this sort of weird, mysterious vibe around the visuals and "story" that plays out the farther you get into the single-player game. But no matter what, whenever I see *Tetris 2* anywhere I will unavoidably, inevitably imitate that exploding parrot. —Kris Randazzo, host of the *Stone Age Gamer* Podcast, writer for *Nintendo Force Magazine*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Three Stooges

PUBLISHER: Activision.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1989.

Ruthless banker I. Fleecem has threatened to foreclose on Ma's orphanage, and it is up to Larry, Moe, and Curly to raise enough money to save the day. What this amounts to is a collection of mini-games: The Cracker Eating Contest (Curly, looking down in his bowl, scoops up crackers before oysters can eat them); Help Wanted: Doctors (guide the trio in tandem up vertical-scrolling hospital corridors, grabbing medical supplies); Help Wanted: Waiters (a classic pie fight, with characters sitting across from each other at a couple of tables); The Boxing Match (Larry runs along a side-scrolling sidewalk at the bottom of the screen, dodging and jumping obstacles, trying to bring back a "Pop Goes the Weasel"-playing radio so Curly can beat the champ); The Slapping Game (Moe slaps, pokes, punches, and kicks Larry and Curly); and Three Stooges Trivia. Fans of the famed comedy trio will recognize classic scenes from various Stooges short films, and the game uses digitized graphics and authentic voice effects. Based on the 1987 computer game.

Notable Quotable:

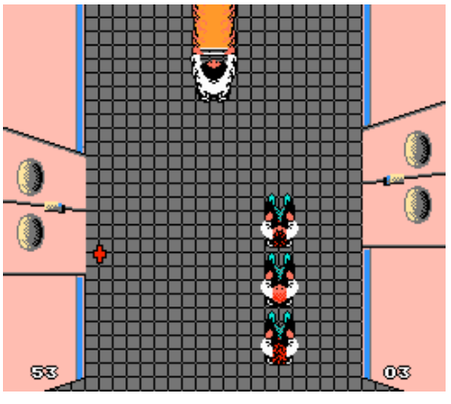
"There's not much game here, but there are some interesting scenes that unfortunately don't change from round to round. The voice effects, of course, are what you notice first. The Stooges do look and sound like the Stooges . . . too shallow to hold up to repeated play." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"Surprisingly accurate . . . there isn't a dud amongst these six games . . . It's never boring. The graphics are done surprisingly well, although some of the large screen depictions of the Stooges are a bit low res. The sound is perfect, containing little sound bites right from the films." —*Digital Press* #21 (September/October 1994)

Notable Quotable:

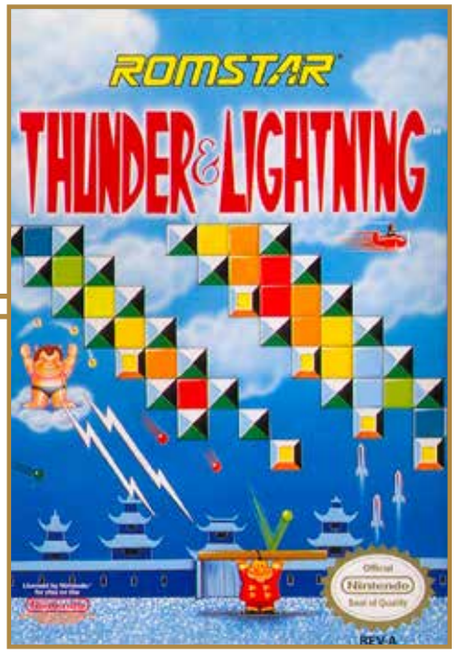
"Within the limits of the memory available, *The Three Stooges* game makes use of high quality digitized sound. There are several spots where The Three Stooges speak and their voices are very clear. The graphics are also good. A few scenes make use of full screen pictures of The Stooges. They look like the originals and are nicely done. The animated Stooges—the miniature-sized ones—aren't as sharp, but suffice . . . a lot of fun and a great game to show your friends." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

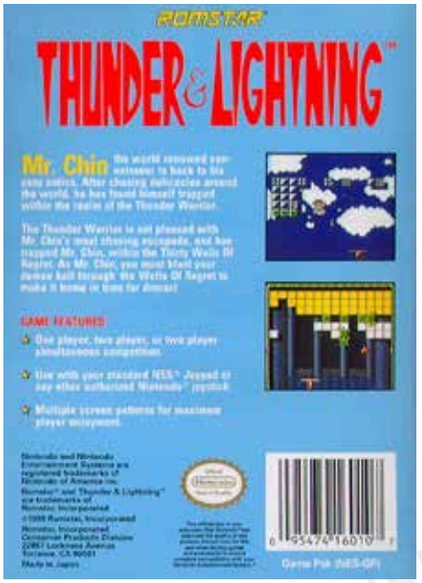


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Thunder & Lightning

PUBLISHER: Romstar.
DEVELOPER: Visco.
GAME TYPE: Ball-and-Paddle, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.





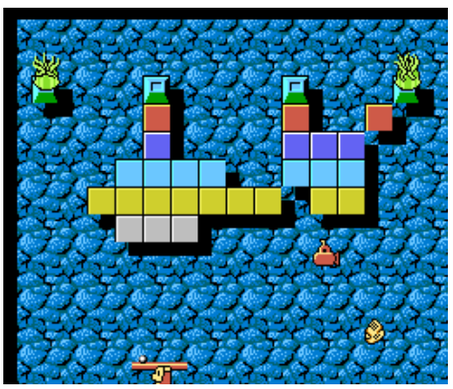
Ported from Seta's 1990 arcade game, *Thunder & Lightning*, like *Arkanoid*, takes the *Breakout* concept—rebound a ball off a paddle and into a wall near the top of the screen to make it disappear one brick at a time—and adds levels (30), power-ups, and enemies. Said foes include birds (hitting it with the ball causes it to fly away and smash bricks), turtles (which crawl into spaces and take the place of blocks), plants (which split and shrink your ball), and vases (which spit out octopi). You'll also face Thunder Warrior, a boss who releases a lightning bolt when you hit him with the ball. Unlike *Arkanoid*, *Thunder & Lightning* has two-player simultaneous action (standing beside one another gives you a wide paddle), square bricks (as opposed to rectangular), and a guy named Mr. Chin who carries the paddle you control along the bottom of the screen. Holding the B button makes Mr. Chin move faster. Power-ups you can acquire by hitting a flying saucer, submarine, or airplane with the ball include glove (for catching the ball), missile (for firing missiles at the bricks), slow (for slowing down the ball), big (gives the ball the ability to go through any brick), 1-Up (extra life), long (increases the length of the paddle), three-way multishot (splits the ball into three separate balls), and six-way multishot (splits the ball into six separate balls). A solid entry in a genre I enjoy, but it's a shame the rotary Vaus controller packaged with *Arkanoid* doesn't work with the game.

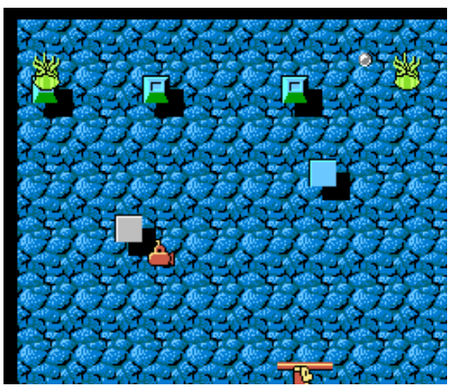
Notable Quotable:

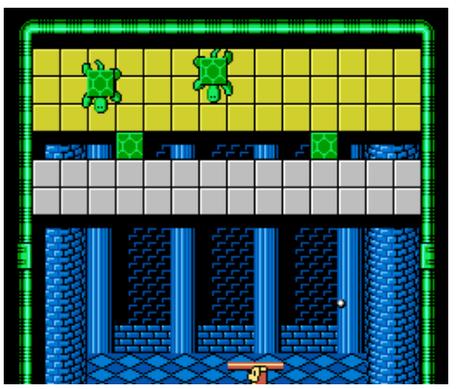
"The only mildly interesting aspect of *Thunder & Lightning* is when [Thunder Warrior] appears hurling lightning bolts at Mr. Chin . . . Graphics are nice, but plain overall. Average would be a kinder way of saying it. The music is impressive but it doesn't vary much. In fact, the soundtrack is so good that it seems wasted on the dull visuals and gameplay . . . There are so many better versions of this style of game on other systems." —John Huxley (www.defunctgames.com)

Notable Quotable:

"An *Arkanoid* rip-off, but that's not necessarily a bad thing . . . controls as smooth as candy . . . there's enough variety here . . . The music is decent . . . The redeeming factor to make this a good game was the multi-player. It splits you up into two mini dudes and you have to rely on one another to make it happen. This makes the game so much more fun and challenging since you can't go through one another and you know you're going to be yelling at your friend for screwing it up." — TheGameHeroes (YouTube)



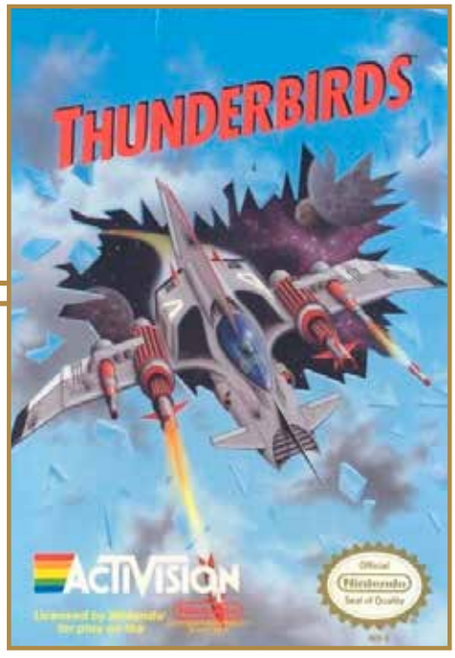




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Thunderbirds

PUBLISHER: Activision.
DEVELOPER: Pack-In-Video.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



Thunderbirds is based on Gerry Anderson's British television series (1965–1966), which employed a form of puppetry called "Supermarionation." Despite the unusual pedigree the game is a fairly standard shooter, but fans of the show will appreciate the nostalgic kick of seeing the marionettes communicating in the introductory sequence and during certain points throughout the game. At the helm of one of five "super-scientific" ships—the Laser Car, Mole, Mach 20 Rocket, Neptune Hydro-Turbojet, or Firefly Atomic Plane—players fly through the air, underwater, deep within the earth, and in outer space, dodging asteroids, terrain, rupturing volcanoes, enemy fire, and other obstacles while blasting away at such enemies as bombers, fighter jets, fireballs, gun turrets, mines, boats, mutant sea monsters, and futuristic space vehicles. Destroying certain enemies unleashes power-ups, including extra lives, double and triple firepower, and an orbital device. There are five orbital device configurations: fire forward, fire backward, fire in a circle around your ship, fire sideways, and fire forward diagonal, which gives you a broader pattern of shooting. The team, aided by Dr. Brain against alien mastermind the Hood, is led by Jeff Tracy, father of the five Thunderbird pilots: Alan, Gordon, John, Scott, and Virgil. Interestingly, the box for the American release removed references to the TV show.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

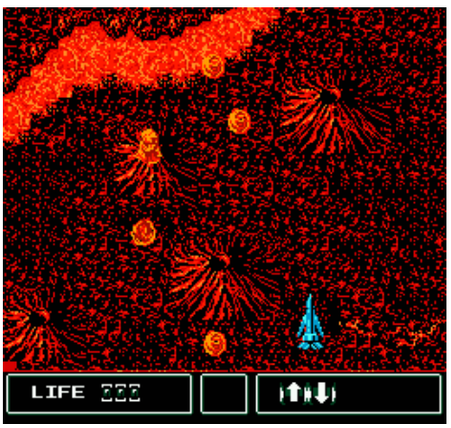
"*Thunderbirds* is an unusual shooter that has no score, but rather a quest to beat. I hate the lack of points, but the graphics are well done. The action, while being sparse in some areas, is adequate to move the game along and keep it slightly above average . . . Needs more imagination and creativity . . . slow paced and nothing to get excited about . . . The licensed puppet adventure TV show storyline is the best part of this game." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1990)

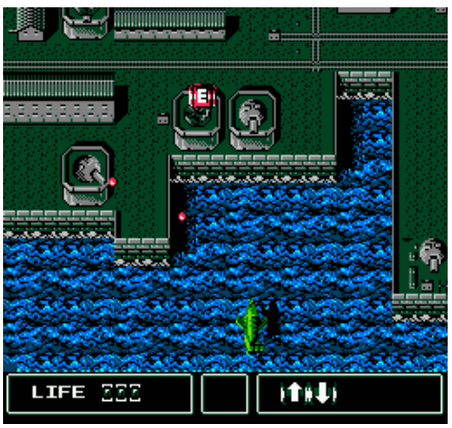
Notable Quotable:

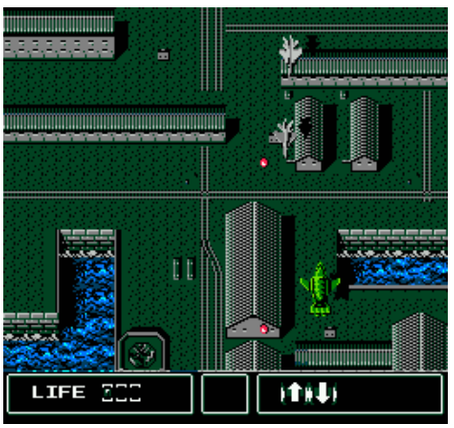
"*Thunderbirds* was a pleasant surprise. Pack-In-Video is not known for making great looking games so I wasn't expecting much here (especially for a franchise game). But *Thunderbirds* is a decent shooter and is quite fun to play . . . stages are varied . . . the full screen cutscenes are neat . . . gameplay is fairly smooth for the most part. The game has several flaws, though, the most significant being the monotonous level design and the complete lack of end of level bosses. There is nothing groundbreaking going on here, but still *Thunderbirds* is a decent and fun shooter to play." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:

"One of the most beautiful games I own from the NES era . . . audio is terrific . . . very challenging." —Famicom World (famicomworld.com)

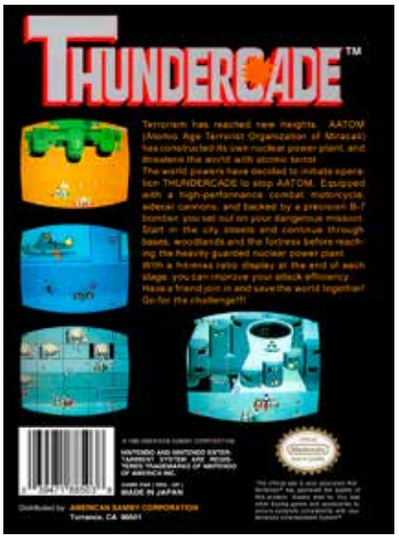


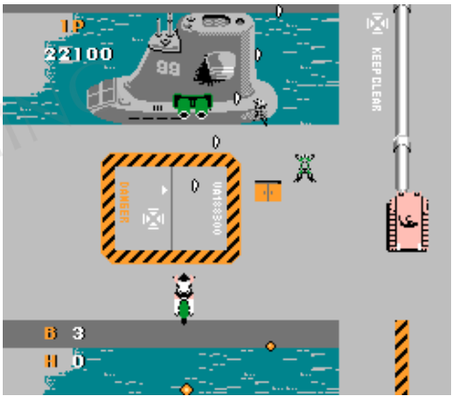




Thundercade

PUBLISHER: American Sammy.
DEVELOPER: Micronics.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.





Unlike most vertical shooters, where you pilot an airplane or spaceship, *Thundercade* puts you at the helm of a combat motorcycle that cruises up the screen, firing a machine gun at soldiers, tanks, jets, submarines, and other enemies. Fans of *Death Race* will appreciate that you can run over the gunmen shooting at you. The motorcycle automatically jumps over water, inclines, and hills. By shooting various buildings, greenery, or other adequately drawn obstacles you can reveal and equip sidecar power-ups consisting of a chain gun and five types of cannons, including dual side cannons. When the action gets hectic you'll want to call on a B-7 bomber to provide air support in the form of multiple explosions around the playfield. This weapon is cool and creative, and really comes in handy when the odds are overwhelming. There are four levels of play: City, Base, Woodland, and Fortress, culminating in the destruction of an atomic power plant. There's a boss battle at the end of each stage. The level design is competent but nothing remarkable. If you can get past the annoying, one-dimensional sound effects and limited color palette *Thundercade* is a fairly enjoyable shooter. The motorcycle handles smoothly, there's a nifty (though short) bonus round between each level, the weapons are interesting, and the action never lets up. Based on Taito's 1987 arcade game.

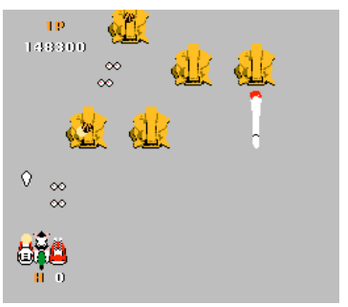
© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Despite the fact that the graphics in *Thundercade* are slightly murky, I still found the action in this shooter to be above average. There's a lot of hidden items to discover in *Thundercade*, which gives the game some of the same overtones that made *Super Mario* a hit. Not fantastic, but good . . . it doesn't take very long to reach the end of the game. A decent translation of the arcade original." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"The shoot-'em-up equivalent of a contemporary summer blockbuster: fun and exciting while you're watching/playing it, but once it's finished, you'd be hard pressed to remember any details . . . wielding your hog with precision is your best bet for staying alive. Two-player co-op helps you get through the game quicker, though you will fight over side guns . . . wouldn't rank in a 'best-of' NES shooter list, but it's not unworthy of your time, either." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



Tiger-Heli

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Micronics.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1987.

A playable port of Taito's 1985 arcade game, *Tiger-Heli* has you flying a stealth jetcopter over land and sea in the fictional terrorist-run country of Cantun, firing missiles (which appear in horizontal groupings of four) at anything and everything, including railroad gates, trailers, gas tanks, stop signs, buildings, cars, trains, trucks, tents, aircraft, gunboats, gun batteries, tanks, and all terrain attack modules. Shooting red or gray crosses brings forth support helicopters that can link up with the jetcopter to provide sideways missiles or additional forward missiles (a super-cool feature somewhat reminiscent of *1942*). Shooting green crosses gives you extra bombs that hit everything within a fairly large radius. Good controls, solid action, and smooth difficulty progression make *Tiger-Heli* enjoyable, but it is graphically simplified (compared to the coin-op game) with lots of flickering.

Memories: Along with such titles as *Castlevania*, *Karnov*, *Metroid*, *Trojan*, and *Ikari Warriors*, *Tiger-Heli* is one of the early games I got for the NES shortly after acquiring the console for Christmas 1987. I played the heck out of it despite the heavy flickering.

Notable Quotable:

"Fast action shooting game . . . awesome firepower . . . offers straight-ahead action gaming with nicely detailed graphics and good sound. We liked it!" —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1987)

Notable Quotable:

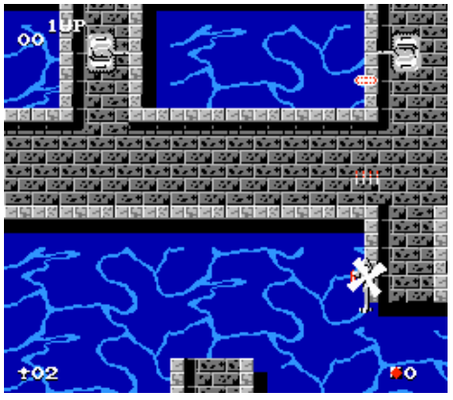
"*Tiger-Heli* represents the shooting type of arcade game at its best. There's plenty of action, lots of things to shoot, and a requirement of some strategy to keep from being quickly destroyed. Once they get the hang of it even younger kids can get some play out of it." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"There are only two problems with the game. First, even with good graphics it is almost impossible to determine the jetcopter's altitude. Second, it is too easy to accidentally discharge an impact bomb while firing missiles. Thankfully neither of these weaknesses create serious problems for *Tiger-Hell*. Therefore, it is one of the most exciting arcade shoot-'em-ups to turn up on the NES." —*Computer Gaming World* (September 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"I spent many hours in front of the TV with this overhead vertical shooter . . . I loved the idea of fighting my way into a terrorist base and blasting everything in sight. It was reminiscent of *Raiden* . . . The graphics are not spectacular, and the gameplay really couldn't be described as smooth, but this is a fun game . . . it has both strategy and difficulty. You'll die a lot, but this really makes you want to try again. There's far more fun than frustration." —8-Bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tiles of Fate

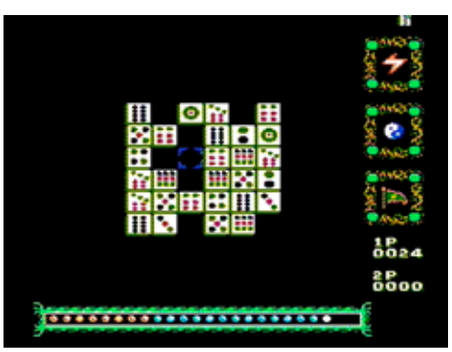
PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Computer & Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

While in the Valley of She-Ting in 303 BC, a young man named Sum-Lee found a leather pouch filled with 42 ancient tiles that once belonged to the gods. A craftsman named Lou Ban carved copies of the tiles out of fine ivory and presented his creations to the seven kings of China. As the kings played with and used the tiles to bring themselves comfort and luxury the land was plagued by great catastrophes. To restore order to the land and achieve symmetry among the tiles you must match the tiles to their identical mates (each tile has one twin), eliminating them from the screen. If two identical tiles are separated from one another by more than two right angles your matching them will have no effect. If you successfully remove all the tiles within a certain time limit you progress to the next level. The tiles are decorated with Chinese symbols and other markings representing war and conflict, wealth and riches, fluctuations of the seasons, directions of the winds, and joy and beauty. Brick walls are in certain tile formations, increasing the challenge. For assistance there are three Forces of Fate you can obtain: the Flash of Chance, which allows symmetry to effect any matching tile on the board, even if it is blocked from its mate by other tiles; the Force of Balance, which can be used to destroy the brick walls; and the Flag of Knowledge, which knows where matches are that you have missed. Edit mode lets you build (but not save) your own board layout. Unlicensed and hard to find.

Memories: When I bought *Tiles of Fate* for less than a buck at FuncoLand back in the late '90s I was prepared not to like it. The packaging looked cheap and the premise of the game seemed questionable. When I plugged the thing into my NES my suspicions about the game seemed confirmed. The graphics were simplistic, the instruction manual was poorly conceived and incomplete, the storyline was filled with plot holes, and the music and sound effects were bland. Surprisingly, I actually had a pretty decent time with it. You might think matching tiles seems childish, like one of those games where the player's goal is to turn over cards and match elephants, tigers, bears, toys, and such. Fortunately *Tiles of Fate* is a formidable challenge once you get past the first two or three levels. The tiles are clearly drawn, but the designs, color schemes, and layouts will fool you, making you quickly dart your eyes all over the screen, desperately trying to find two tiles that match and are unobstructed by other tiles. It's not a great game, but it's not a bad one, either.

Notable Quotable:

"Playing the game is much less confusing than reading about it. And you should play it. Thanks to its unlicensed nature, *Tiles of Fate* is one of the unsung puzzle gems of the NES library. Don't feel bad about downloading it. It was never legal in the first place." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Time Lord

PUBLISHER: Milton Bradley.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

The evil Drakkon Lords have formed alliances in four historical time zones: Castle Harman in Medieval England (1250), Deadman's Gulch in the Old West (1860), A Pirate Ship in the Caribbean (1650), and World War II in France (1943). As the Time Lord (no official affiliation to Doctor Who) you must travel back to each time period and battle beasts, pick up weapons, and find five orbs per level. Each era boasts music, visuals, and weaponry befitting of the time. At first you can only punch and kick the archers, dragons, vultures, wild dogs, crabs, sea serpents, pirates, soldiers, and other enemies you'll encounter, but you can acquire weapons (which are hidden in packages scientists send you), including a broadsword (with magical powers), a six-shooter, a shotgun, a cutlass, a throwing dagger, a pistol, and hand grenades. In the "present," which is actually futurist 2099, you'll battle robots, hoverbots, and Drakkon stormers with your rocket laser gun and missile gun. You'll also climb stairs and ladders and jump over rolling barrels, travelling both horizontally and vertically on 2.5-D playfields.

Notable Quotable:
"With its present faults—obscure puzzles, frustrating gameplay, and poor presentation—you'd better spend your time and money on something else." —*Total!!* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"You run around and kill the same looking types of enemies, which tend to swarm at you one right after the other, until you happen upon the five orbs you need to advance to the next stage. This wouldn't be so bad if it weren't so repetitive . . . Besides being annoying, the countless enemies make the game quite hard." —Christopher Michael Baker (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Opens with a futuristic sci-fi tune that sounds a lot like the Commodore 64 SID tracks in vogue at the time, with rapid alternation of tones and frequency sweeps to produce interesting sounds . . . the game feels very much like a British 8-bit home computer game—there's a fair amount of action, but the gameplay is puzzle oriented at heart . . . the levels are not large, but triggering each of the orbs takes quite a bit of trial and error and running out of lives eventually becomes less of a concern than the passing days . . . *Time Lord* is an interesting challenge, and I imagine it wouldn't take long to play through once all the orbs have been discovered. But that's no mean feat—it's no wonder Milton Bradley advertised their own Game Counselor hotline on the back of the manual." —Gaming After 40 (gamingafter40.blogspot.com)

Insider Insight: When I was a kid I saw *Time Lord* in the back of an issue of *Game Players* magazine, but I wasn't impressed and never discussed it with my parents. So it came as a bit of a shock when Christmas morning came and one of the games under the tree was *Time Lord*. I tried my best to feign appreciation but I had no idea what prompted my parents to get it for me, unless someone paid them to take it out of the store.

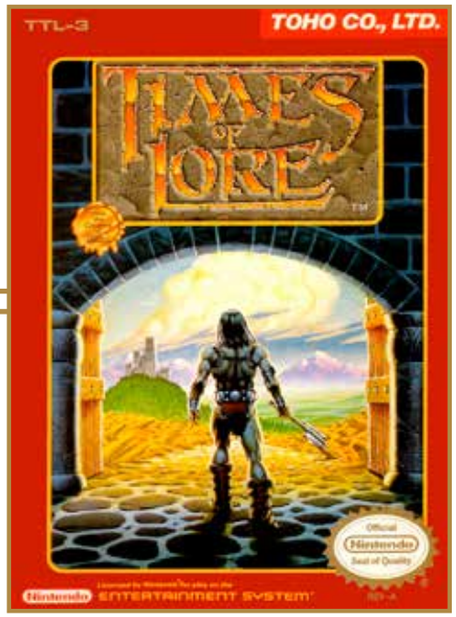
After putting some time into *Battletoads*, the game I was actually excited to get for Christmas, I decided that I was done dying in the Turbo Tunnel and played a little *Time Lord*. I was actually impressed by the graphics and music on the opening screen, so I thought that maybe it wouldn't be too bad of a game after all. At the time I didn't realize that David Wise was a name that I would come to cherish in terms of video game music.

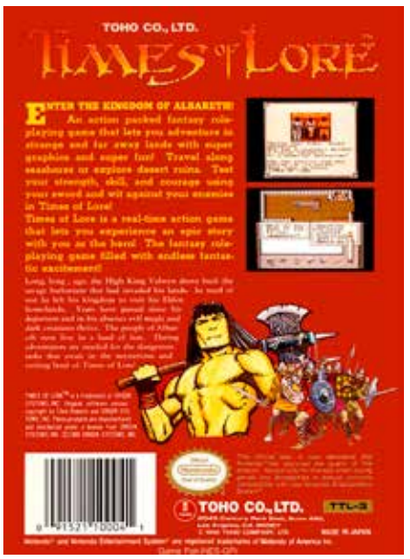
During that Christmas break my cousin Kelly and I ended up spending quite a bit of time on *Time Lord*, enjoying the fact that it was a side-scrolling platformer beat-'em-up with puzzle elements. That, and the fact that it was HARD—we both liked the challenge! It isn't a great game by any means, but after thinking I was going to hate it I was pleasantly surprised that I actually liked it. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Times of Lore

PUBLISHER: Toho.
DEVELOPER: Origin Systems.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.





Based on the 1988 computer game, *Times of Lore* finds the Kingdom of Albareth under attack. As a Knight, a Valkyrie, or a Barbarian (each with minor differences in attack strength and speed), you must confront this siege by journeying through forests, towns, dungeons, seashores, deserts, and other locales and engaging in real time battles with such enemies as bandits, orcs, ghosts, slimes, and skeletons. The action, viewed from overhead, covers the entire screen, but pop-ups appear on the bottom half of the playfield when it's time to make selections (look, grab, hold, give, speak, and the like) and talk to characters to garner clues and progress through the areas (conversations are conducted via key phrases). In addition to battling creatures you must use keys to open doors, eat food to recover energy, and pick up such useful items and weapons as a dagger, an axe, boots (for walking long distances), scrolls (for freezing or destroying all onscreen enemies), and potions (for restoring hit points and floating and traveling at high speeds). This is an obscure, hard-to-find game.

Notable Quotable:

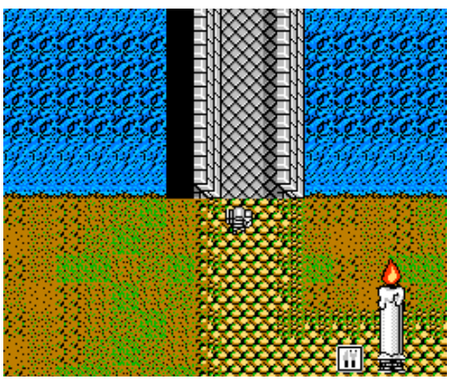
"Like other role playing games that were originally designed as PC games, the pace of this game may be slower than that of most adventures designed for the NES. If you're a fan of long, involving quests, though, this one's for you." — *Nintendo Power* (March 1991)

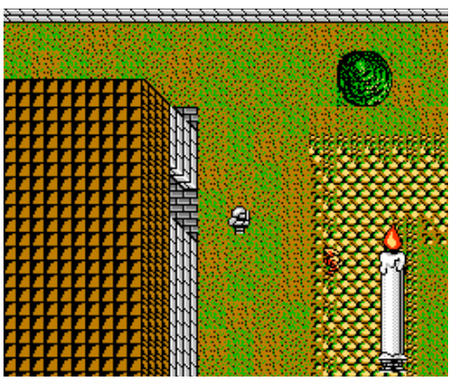
Notable Quotable:

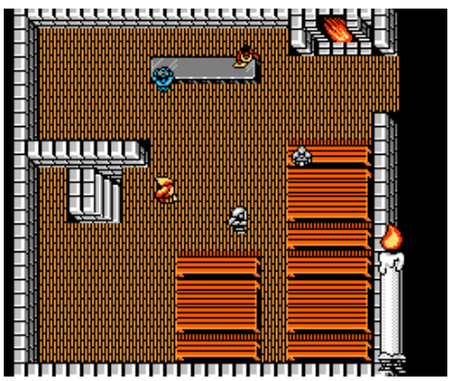
"An example of addition by subtraction in a port. The PC/Apple versions took too long to get between towns, and monsters were too lethal and numerous. Futzing with the admittedly innovative interface was a handicap in fights. *ToL* for the NES tweaks the world map to create shortcuts . . . a satisfactory if bland RPG . . . a respectable story with interesting characters, and the picture style controls give a better fantasy feel than text blocks in other RPGs . . . adds little to the PC version—but it affords far fewer frustrating deaths." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Plays like a significantly less complicated game of the *Dragon Warrior* variety . . . the most fun thing to do in this game is simply exploring the vast world in which the game takes place . . . Since enemies can be spotted in advance it's almost possible to avoid most battles by simply steering clear of the sprites . . . the map itself is impressive in terms of its scale and detail . . . the color palette used was poorly designed . . . the controls in this game are incredibly frustrating . . . very short in comparison to other NES-era RPGs . . . an interesting, offbeat little title that I'd give a moderate recommendation to." —Very Helpful (veryhelpful.net)



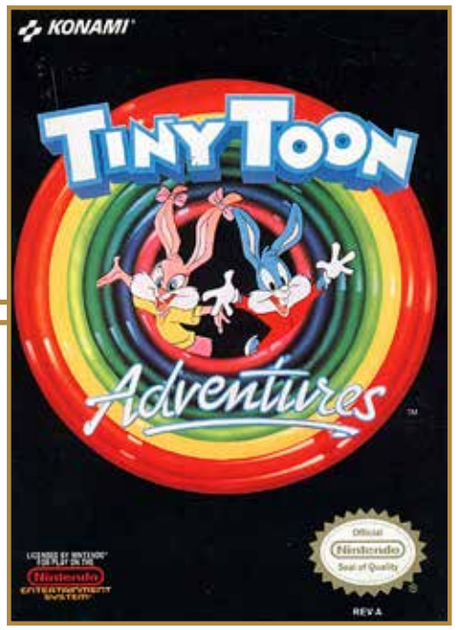




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tiny Toon Adventures

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



Montana Max has kidnapped Babs Bunny and it is up to her friends to rescue her. The main character is Buster Bunny, who is the best jumper, but players can switch control to Dizzy Devil (unleashes spin attack), Furrball (climbs walls), or Plucky Duck (glides and swims well). The characters' special abilities are based on a power meter that decreases a little with use but slowly replenishes over time. Through the game's six short levels—Field of Screamz, Motion Ocean, Sure Weird Forest, Boomtown, Wackyland, and Monty's Mansion—players must jump on bad guys to defeat them, leap on platforms (including moving ones), avoid traps, trigger switches, and open doors. Enemies include Roderick Rat, Danforth Drake, Rubella Rat, Captain Claw, Dr. Gene Splicer, and others, including Elmyra, one of the game's earlier boss battles. The colorful, cartoonlike action will appeal to fans of the show and to fans of such games as *Super Mario Bros.* and *Felix the Cat*. Based on Steven Spielberg's cartoon creation *Tiny Toon Adventures* (syndicated, 1990–95).

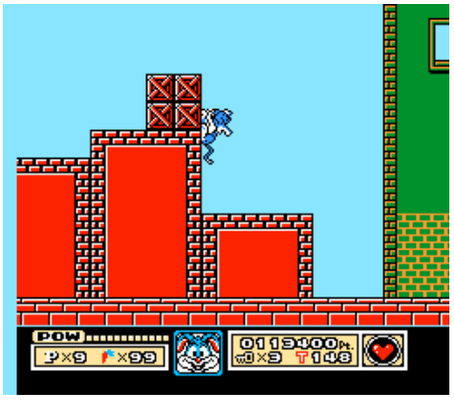
Notable Quotable:
"Nonstop fun. With extra characters to play and lots of superb animation, this is a must." —*N-Force* (December 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"The popularity of the Tiny Toons amongst the kiddie set alone is enough to ensure this game a place on somebody's Christmas wish list. Strip away that popularity, however, and you've still got a solid game with decent challenge." —*GamePro* (December 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"A decent NES platformer that probably could have been a great one had Konami put just a little more thought into it. The character swapping idea is really cool . . . controls wonderfully . . . too hard and too short to really be a classic. —Nathan Major (sharkberg.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The sprites are a bit small, but the great animation easily makes up for it . . . The sound effects and pieces of music, on the other hand, fall by the wayside." —Play Time (July 1992)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Insider Insight: Konami did a great job bringing this hit children's cartoon to the NES. I played this one as a kid but couldn't get past the first boss, and in playing it again as an adult I can see why. The game itself isn't super hard, but the momentum around your characters' movement takes a bit of time to get used to. Otherwise this is a really fun game with brightly colored graphics and upbeat music. I've heard this game called a *Super Mario Bros. 3* clone, but that's unfair. Sure, it has some similarities, but it has enough of an individual personality to stand on its own. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

Insider Insight: If there was ever a game that stood as the perfect representation of a cartoon series this was it. I wish I could say I owned *Tiny Toon Adventures* as a kid, but I didn't. However, I rented it so many times I probably could have just bought it and saved a ton of money. I loved the cartoon, and the video game complemented it very well. You could play as several characters from the show, which was rare for a game from the NES era. And every level had tons of characters and Easter eggs to find from the show. It was a joy to try getting to the next level and see all the new faces you could pick out from the series. This game was a real treat to fans, including myself. —Chris Bores, The Irate Gamer on YouTube

Tiny Toon Adventures 2: Trouble in Wackyland

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Action, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Our favorite Tiny Toons—Buster Bunny, Babs Bunny, Plucky Duck, Hampton Hog, and Furrball the cat—have been invited to a new amusement park. Unfortunately for our furry friends, each ride is a trap set by Montana Max. In Train, which has forced scrolling, Hampton walks across the top of a moving train, jumping over flags, jump kicking Roderick Rat and birds, and collecting cupcakes. Roller Coaster finds Babs riding up and down hills and loops, grabbing grapes and avoiding obstacles by jumping and by flipping upside down. Log Ride puts Furrball aboard the titular log, surfing up and down side-scrolling hills while jumping over fish, logs, and other obstacles. Bumper Cars is the oddball overhead view event, with players driving a round car, bouncing off bumpers and bumping enemy cars into holes. Finally, earning four golden tickets grants entrance to the Fun House, in which Buster jumps over gaps, hops on moving platforms, turns flips to attack enemies, walks upside down, and avoids a love struck Elmyra.

Notable Quotable:

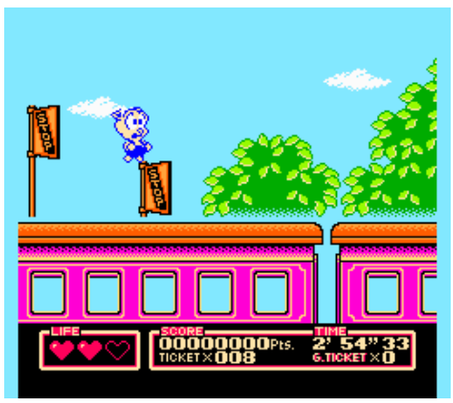
"A great cutesy game for the kids . . . The challenge is decent, and the graphics are as good as 8-bit can get . . . My only complaint is the lack of decent techniques for the seasoned gamers to control. The game is oversimplified!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1993)

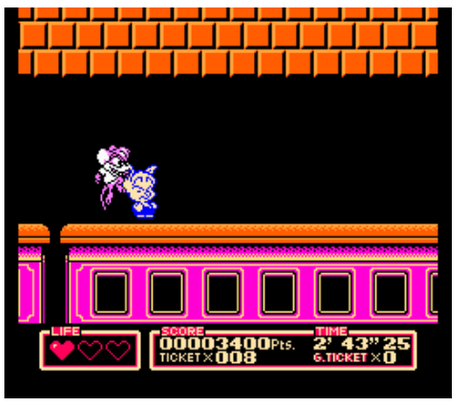
Notable Quotable:

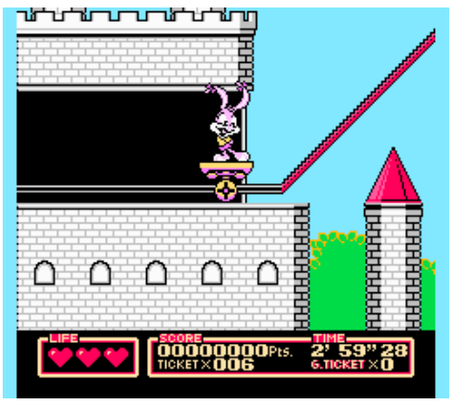
"The sequel to a darn good platformer . . . I never suspected that Konami would take a great game and ruin everything about it . . . Bumper cars are an excellent example of where the game goes wrong . . . Probably the one that comes closest to fun is the one that finds Hampton dashing back and forth atop a moving train . . . The graphics throughout most of the outing, aside from the inevitable flicker so common on the system, are good . . . the music isn't half bad." —Jason Venter (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"A solid platformer that manages to be different enough from other games in the genre . . . [Give] this one a try for some short-term amusement." —Nerd Bacon (nerdbacon.com)



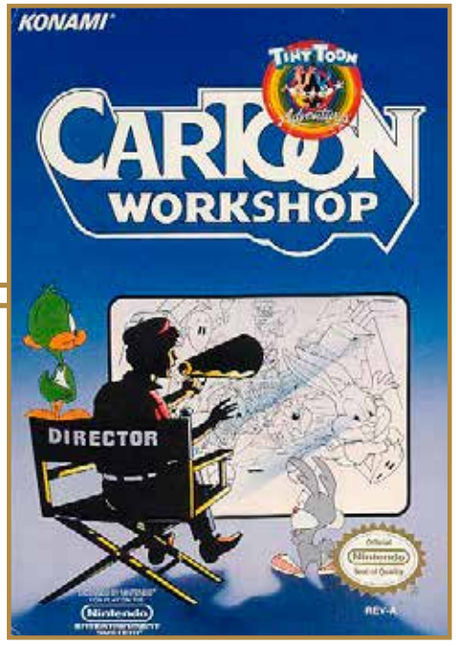




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tiny Toon Adventures: Cartoon Workshop

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Novotrade International.
GAME TYPE: Art, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



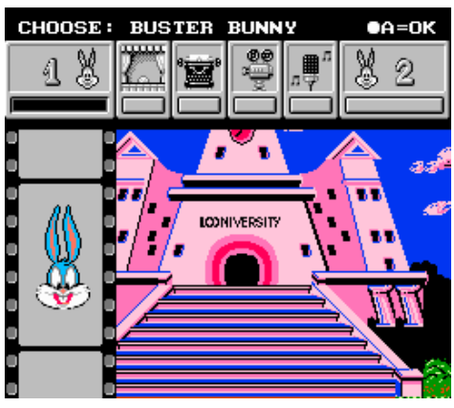
Want to create your own Saturday morning style cartoons? Check out *Tiny Toon Adventures: Cartoon Workshop*, which lets users produce animated, side-scrolling short films. From a selectable list of Buster Bunny, Babs Bunny, Plucky Duck, Furrball, Calamity Coyote, and Little Beeper, you can feature up to two characters on screen at once. Each character can perform such actions as skipping, jumping, skating, eating, swimming, kicking a ball, and/or blasting off in a rocket. They can also be placed in a variety of settings, such as a lake, a city, a desert, a forest, or an ocean. Unfortunately Hamton J. Pig, Elmyra Duff, and Montana Max are not included. You can add music, sound effects, and captions, but you can't write your own dialogue, which is a shame. You can't save your creations via password or battery backup, but the rather lengthy instruction manual gives you directions on saving your cartoons to video tape with a VCR. If you're retro enough to read this book you still own a VCR, right?

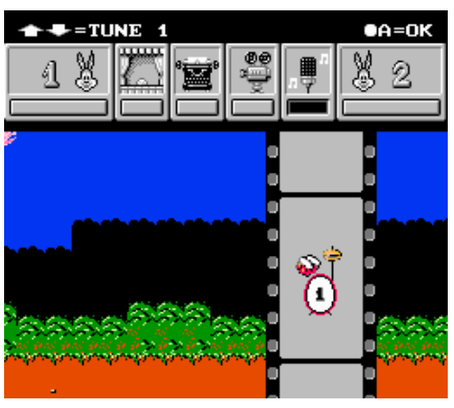
Notable Quotable:

"The NES has limitations when it comes to running something like this, as it shows in the severe lack of characters and backdrops. There are quite a lot of animations to micromanage, but the interaction between characters is just poor . . . Stick to *Mario Paint* on SNES or the *Shoot'Em-Up Construction Kit* on the C64 for more rewarding animation fun." —Jim Evans, *Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the NES Library (1985–1995)*

Notable Quotable:

"The type of pseudo-edutainment game one expects on the PC, not the NES . . . It's ambitious, particularly for a system that didn't offer mouse support . . . But whether due to space limitations or sheer laziness, *Cartoon Workshop*, as a whole, isn't deep enough. Only having six selectable characters is a joke, given the richness of the Tiny Toons ensemble, and the dialogue choices ('It's time to party, Buster-style!') are pathetic; the option to write your own dialogue should be a given. Many of the backdrops are simple colors rather than actual environments . . . your finished product will likely come across as a half-hearted imitation of a *Tiny Toons* cartoon . . . a well-intentioned idea executed on the wrong system. Budding young animators should look to computers for their kicks." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

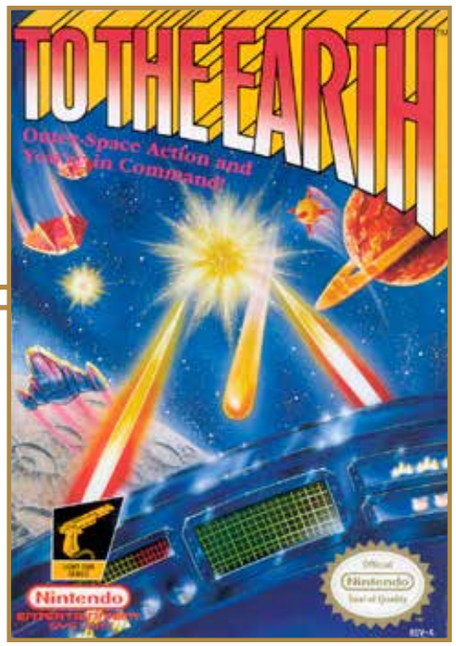


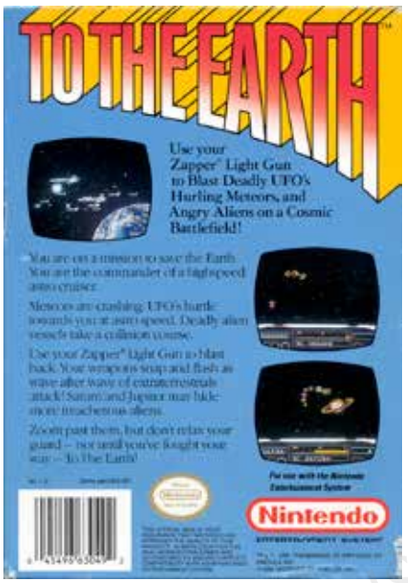


SCANNER PUBLISHING

To the Earth

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Cirque Verte.
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.





Set in 2050, when our planet is subject to a bacteriological attack from the Raggosians, *To the Earth* is a refreshing change of pace thematically from such traditional Zapper light fun fare as *Duck Hunt* and *Hogan's Alley*. Instead of a shooting range of some kind, the action takes place in outer space (four stages in all), with players firing away at fast spaceships that begin in the distance and whiz close by, creating a neat visual effect. Shooting enemies, which have such names as Zoomer, Piranha, Manta, Triceptor, and Crescent Fighter, gains energy, while missed shots and getting shot depletes your energy. A limited number of smart bombs are available (which you get by shooting a certain number of enemies in a row while your energy is 100%), and destroying comets provides players with barrier shields. Other objects to shoot include laser bombs, hyper missiles, asteroids, and bosses, including a swirling, dragon-like creature called Zambuka. It's hard to believe that the 8-bit NES is capable of such speed as you see in *To the Earth*. Not only do the ships move quickly, they do it with style. However, the game is difficult. The ships move so fast that they're hard to get in your sights. The smart bombs help, as do the shields and energy boosters, but this is a frustrating game.

Notable Quotable:
"You'll need nerves of titanium and the reflexes of a Targothian panther as the invaders attack you at warp speeds . . . your concentration must be at its peak when taking on the major sentries at the end of each of the four missions." —*Nintendo Power* (July 1989)

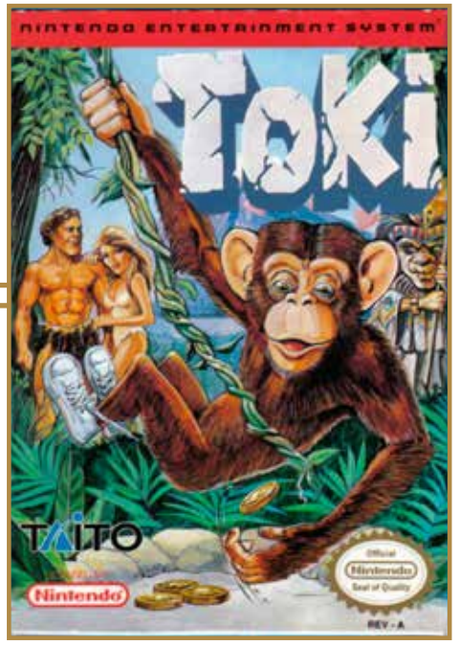
Notable Quotable:
"A very straightforward shooting game with little to recommend it except for very fast action and good 3D effects as objects hurtle toward the player's ship. There isn't nearly enough variety to keep the gamer interested for more than a few playing sessions (if that long). The game looks good but has no depth." —*Computer Entertainer* (December 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"In Stage 1 the action is non-stop but highly repetitive, with only a handful of enemies and projectiles. Most enemy ships move too quickly . . . Stage 2 is much of the same, but there's a cool part where asteroids fly into the screen and head directly for your ship . . . In Stage 3 you're expected to be a mind reader, as projectiles launch and hit your vehicle within a split second . . . Things go from the ridiculous to the absurd in Stage 4 . . . There are bosses to add some variety but there's no strategy to beating them . . . There's only one boring music track, but the graphics are mildly appealing with some nice scaling effects . . . feels like a tech demo that was hastily repeated across four monotonous stages and slapped onto a cartridge to meet deadlines." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Toki

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Daiei Seisakusho.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



Adapted from TAD Corporation's 1989 arcade game, *Toki* has you guiding a man-turned-monkey through six levels of play: Labyrinth of Caves, Lake Neptune, Caverns of Fire, Ice Palace, Dark Jungle, and Golden Palace. He leaps over obstacles and onto moving platforms, climbs up and down vines, runs up and down hills, swims, and jumps on such enemies as ape warriors, flying heads, seed pods, flaming fish, baby dinos, dancing penguins, smoke genies, armor lizards, and guardian squids. By grabbing weapons Toki, who can duck and crouch, can also shoot enemies (straight ahead, up, and diagonally) with the following weapons he can acquire: double, wave (two blasts that move like a wave), three-way, flame, and fireball. Other useful items to grab include keys (for entering locked rooms), football helmets (for protection against enemies, but not traps), food (for extra points), clocks (for additional time to complete the area), and shoes (for jumping higher). The action scrolls vertically as well as horizontally. The arcade version, which does have richer graphics, moves slower and has one-hit deaths, making the NES game superior.

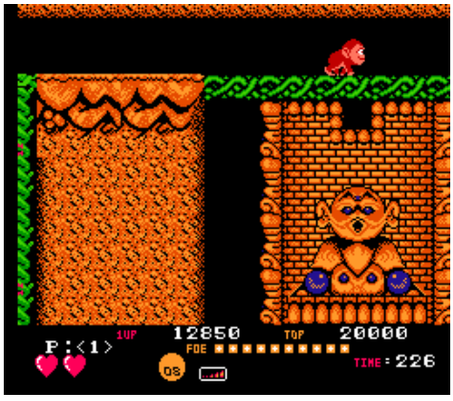
Notable Quotable:

"The bosses are not particularly hard in this game, both because they don't take too many hits to defeat and because they don't flash between hits, so you can hit them many times in a row . . . by the standards of the day the levels were not too hard either. To make matters worse the levels are riddled with checkpoints, and, even when you continue, you continue from the last checkpoint you reached, although if you received any life bar increasing items they don't carry through the continue. Because of that, what is already a short, six-level game is made even easier to beat, but that doesn't prevent this game from being fun to play through once in a while." —Game Freaks 365 (gamefreaks365.com)

Notable Quotable:

"I have always been a big fan of the original *Toki* arcade game . . . features an incredibly unique and elaborate level design for a game of its genre, and era. Each stage comes with its own set of rules—some have middle bosses, others get Toki to swim underwater, whereas others get him to ride a fast-paced roller coaster . . . conversion is incredibly faithful to the original . . . Obviously the graphics have taken a hit (sprites are smaller and fairly flat in general), but otherwise the gameplay and controls are surprisingly perfect and accurate. Some game elements have been omitted here and there, but they remain extremely rare occurrences and most of the arcade game is there, including the catchy soundtrack . . . excellent adaptation." —Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

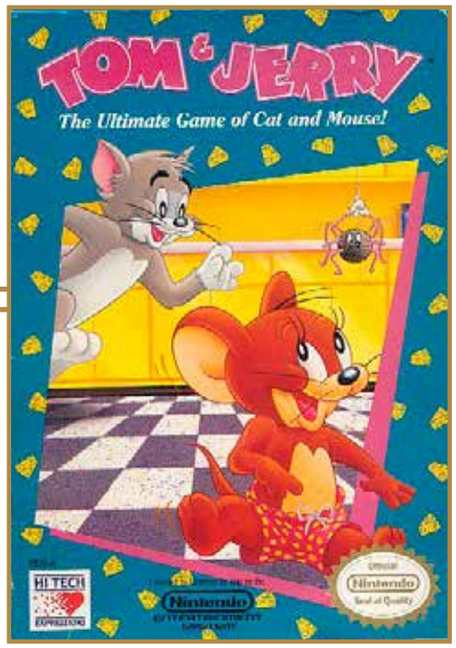
Insider Insight: It's shooting and platforming fun with *Toki*! You play as Toki, out to save your sweetie from an evil sorcerer that kidnapped her and turned you into an ape! Luckily you can spit a number of projectiles at enemies. The controls and everything here feel really good, but the game can be challenging. I never played this one as a kid—I only played the sequel on the Sega Genesis. It took me a little while to warm up to the NES version, but once I got going I found it to be rather enjoyable. It's a pretty short game overall, so it's great for a quick playthrough. Toki, Toki, Toki! —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

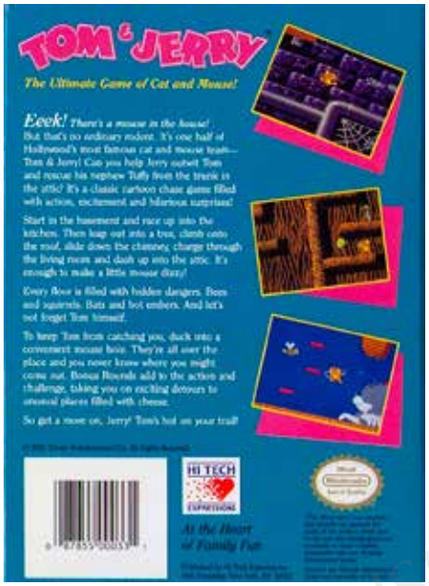


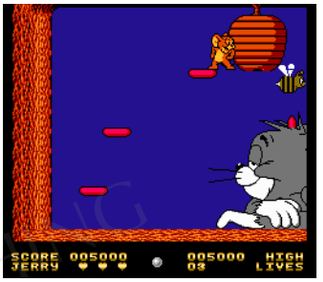
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tom & Jerry

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.







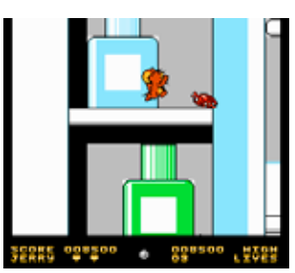
Crazy cat Tom has "mousenapped" Jerry's nephew Tuffy and locked him in a trunk in the attic. As the running, jumping, climbing (wires, power cords, and the like) Jerry you must work your way from the basement up through the house, throwing marbles at bats, bees, spiders, and other enemies along the way. You can control how far and how high Jerry jumps by holding down the jump button for differing lengths of time. Unlike the more simplistic (though graphically superior) SNES game (which is called *Tom and Jerry*), the NES cartridge lets Jerry pick up a variety of defensive weapons, including bubble gum, a meat cleaver, a hammer, a cup of water, a drill, and invisible ink. Jerry can eat small pieces of cheese for bonus points and larger cheese wedges to recharge his energy. By entering certain mouse holes you can play bonus stages to collect lots of cheese. Other mouse holes are exits to the next level in the house.

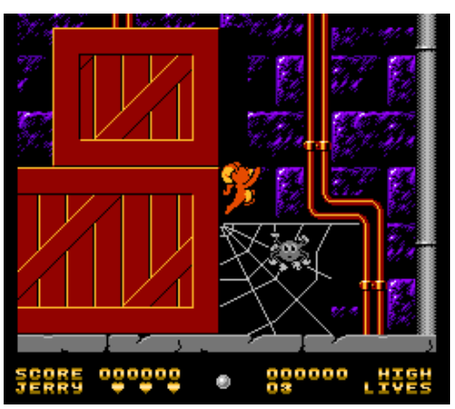
Notable Quotable:
"Video game Tom and Jerry are spitting images of their cartoon counterparts, and they've got the animated moves to match their good looks . . . One of the better 8-bit titles out this year, *Tom & Jerry* offers a decent level of challenge and animation that's worth its weight in cheese." —*GamePro* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"I was deeply disappointed by this game. With the Tom and Jerry characters and their history of antics you would think that a variety of great play mechanics would be created around their familiar storyline. Unfortunately you get another scroller with little originality in play." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"With powerups galore and secret rooms to explore via mouse holes hidden on certain levels this is a great platformer. The graphics let it down a bit, but the cartoon soundtrack is bitchin' . . . a hell of a lot of fun . . . Nice chunky sprites, but some nasty flicker and screen corruption . . . topnotch tunes . . . A little difficult to control but you soon get the hang of it . . . Standard platform action but well-presented." —*N-Force* (November 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"After starring in more than 200 cartoons, entertaining captivated audiences in more than 90 countries, and winning eight Academy Awards, this power duo now makes its video game debut in Hi Tech's latest action packed adventure game, *Tom & Jerry*. Will all that experience pay off? Don't get yourself caught in a mousetrap—check out our furry friends in the most exciting Tom & Jerry appearance yet!" —*Nintendo Power* (November 1991)





SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Tombs & Treasure

PUBLISHER: Infocom.
DEVELOPER: Compile.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Graphic Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

A famous archeologist has disappeared in the ruins of Chichen Itza. To make it through the ancient Mayan city, which includes temples, sacrificial lakes, the high priest's tomb, and the deadly Ball Court, you must guide your party of adventurers—a boy and girl you name, plus a guide named Jose—as they collect and use items in strategic ways. This involves pointing and clicking on icons representing various forms of action, including go, look, take, put, use, move, push, pull, smash, fight, join (join together two items from your inventory), and wash (wash item in your inventory). Each of the three characters has different strengths. For example, the girl can use musical instruments to solve puzzles while Jose is strong enough to push secret walls. The screen is divided into five windows: Location, Message, Icon, Text, and Action. Unlike such similar games as *Déjà Vu* and *Shadowgate*, *Tombs & Treasure*, which is based on the 1986 Japanese computer game *Taiyou no Shinden Asteka II*, features turn-based, RPG-style monster battles where you equip a sword. There's also a top-down map to navigate the areas. The back of the box for this hard-to-find game boasts that it features more than 50 hours of gameplay.

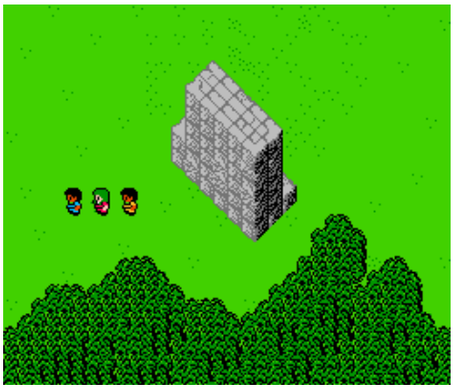
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"A ton of backtracking to earlier areas, although it's often obvious when you have to do so. Near the beginning of the game you'll find a headless silver statue, only to later stumble upon a disembodied silver head . . . The hard part is figuring out where in the hell you're expected to hike to next thanks to that giant overworld, or in the case of backtracking, trying to remember which location was where." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

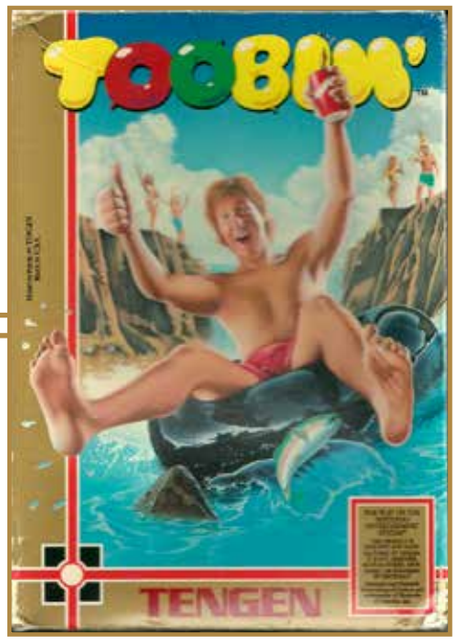
Notable Quotable:

"The game's environs can serve as a surrogate for a tour of Chichen Itza, the well-maintained ancient Mayan city in the Yucatan . . . the developers deserve praise for their research and attention to capturing real details . . . a lot to like about this adventure title, which has a simple plot with a complicated solution . . . You will likely get stuck, flustered, and aggravated, finding yourself cursing the Mayan gods or the programmers, but that's part of what makes an older game memorable . . . The game has its shortcomings, namely the presence of turn-based combat (needlessly added to the NES version), which seems like a mindless nuisance." —Adam Romano (www.defunctgames.com)



Toobin'

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Tengen.
GAME TYPE: Boat/Watercraft Racing, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.



Toobin' puts you in an inner tube, floating down a variety of rivers, including such diverse waterways as the Colorado, Styx, Nile, Mississipi, and Amazon. You'll paddle down a prehistoric swamp, avoiding dinosaurs and cavemen; ride down a city river, dealing with punks and industrial sludge; and navigate the Canals of Mars, where you'll encounter spikes and Martians. As Bif or Jet you maneuver down the screen to reach a whirlpool to advance to the next level. You'll steer around such obstacles as whirlpools, dinosaur tails, logs, and bullets (people on the riverbanks shoot at you) while throwing cans at alligators, hunters, cavemen, and other enemies. Cans are limited, but you can collect more that are floating in the water. You can also pick up treasure chests for points, patches to repair your tube, beach balls for increased speed, and letters spelling out TOOBIN for bonus points and extra lives. Going through gates increases your score multiplier. The game has a two player simultaneous mode, but it's a far cry from the quarter muncher, where Bif and Jet race one another in their own tubes. Instead, one player steers the tube while the other throws cans. In addition the NES version doesn't have the same feel as its coin-op counterpart thanks to the latter's five-button control scheme, which made the tube floating experience feel more authentic. The game is unlicensed, but common.

Notable Quotable:

"While it doesn't look the greatest (borderline Atari 2600 graphics here), the laid back, hilarious nature of the original game still shines through." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"Gone are the impressive graphics and detailed backgrounds. All of the bits of goofy charm (monsters in the water, rednecks fishing, etc.) have been reduced to barely recognizable sprites. Forget rushing down amazing waterfalls; the best you can expect from this NES port are the occasional strong currents. On the other hand, they did scrap the needlessly complicated five-button set up . . . To offset the improved steering Tengen has increased the size of the playfield. Unfortunately, they also decreased the size of the hazards. It's easier than ever to avoid the deadly fish and thorny bushes that want to pop your inner tube. All of this tinkering has left the game far too easy and ultimately not very much fun." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

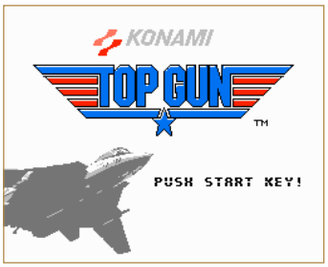
Insider Insight: There are few cases I can think of where the home conversion of a coin-op is more playable than the original, especially one that was designed with custom controls in mind like *Toobin'*, but here we are. I never actually played *Toobin'* in the arcades back in the day so the home versions were my first experience with the game. It was only two years ago when I finally played a *Toobin'* cab at a retro gaming expo, and I didn't like it at all! You could argue this is because I was so used to playing the home ports, but it's actually because the coin-op's controls are just so unintuitive, at least to me.

On the arcade cabinet you had an arrangement of five buttons for each player—no joystick at all, just buttons. These buttons were meant to realistically emulate paddling in a giant rubber ring, giving you full control over your range of movement, which was slightly restricted by your constant movement in the tide of the river. This five-button set up is extremely awkward and you'll constantly press the wrong buttons, or find that you need to press more than one at once while still trying to keep an eye on the gameplay. In the NES game the controls are drastically simplified, so you use the joypad/joystick to control your movement, with the buttons only used to throw cans at enemies. This makes the game much more enjoyable, especially with a second player. It's a great port, and in my mind represents one of the best co-op games to appear on Nintendo's gray box. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for more than 15 years

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Top Gun

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.



Top Gun puts you in the cockpit of an F-14 Tomcat, viewing the action from a first-person perspective. You use an unlimited supply of bullets and one of three types of missiles (hound, wolf, and tiger, each varying in quantity and power) to battle fighters, attack copters, submarines, battle cruisers, tanks, and other enemies. The game is short, offering just four missions: Training, Destroying an Aircraft Carrier, Destroying an Enemy Base, and Destroying a Space Shuttle. Radar helps you keep track of the location of enemies, and a sighting device is used for targeting them. Other gauges to monitor include altimeter, air speed indicator, fuel meter, artificial horizon, and damage indicator. In addition to combat, players must refuel (while airborne) and land on aircraft carriers, making for a challenging game. Very loosely based on the popular 1986 feature film starring Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis.

Memories: *Top Gun* has gained a measure of infamy over the years because of the difficulty of the landing sequences. Yeah, landing is a challenge, but it's certainly doable with some practice. Perhaps the ease of modern games has contributed to *Top Gun*'s tough reputation.

Notable Quotable:
"The designers have concentrated on flying and fighting rather than reproducing all the dials and buttons of the real thing . . . you can just pick it up and start to play . . . an excellent flight game." —*Computer and Video Games* (January 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"Visually sparse, but the enemy sprites are extremely effective—especially in air-to-air combat . . . decent sound effects . . . varied and entertaining action . . . bound to appeal to all shoot-'em-up addicts." —*Advanced Computer Entertainment* (March 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"As in many Nintendo games, the emphasis is on playability rather than graphic presentation. On this level *Top Gun* succeeds, as it provides four limited, but very playable missions with extra features—landing, refueling, and a missile strategy—to spruce up the action." —*The Games Machine* (March 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"A realistic version of the theme plays. The action is quite good . . . the deeper you reach into the game the better it gets . . . While the graphics are good, they're not great, though the rest of the game with the view from the cockpit window is pretty simple in detail. However, there's good detail in the enemy craft as they swoop past you, and the graphics of the carrier are pretty realistic . . . a fine flying game with lots of good fighting action." —*Computer Entertainer* (December 1987)

Insider Insight: When I was around eight or nine I thought there was nothing cooler than fighter pilots and the machinery they flew in. Even at that young age I'd already seen the movie *Top Gun* countless times. It was like X-Wings and TIE Fighters, only real (per se). One Saturday morning during this era my dad came home with a small bundle of NES cartridges after scouting pawn shops for yard tools. I was super excited because the bundle included *Top Gun*.

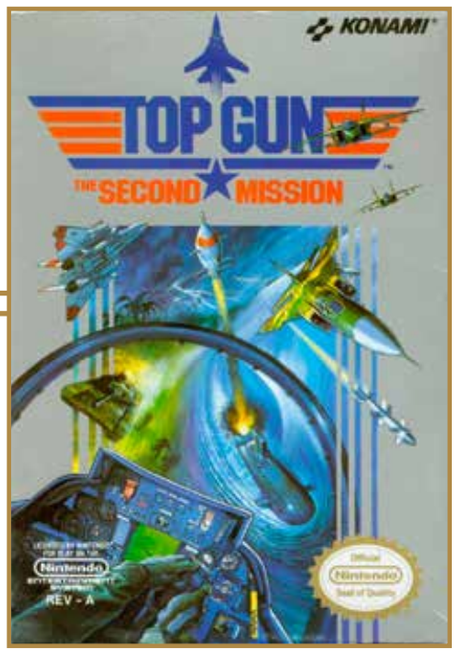
Top Gun wasn't the greatest flight simulator, and even by NES standards it felt a little bare bones. Compared to the game's 1989 sequel, it definitely feels more like a prototype than a full-fledged game. Regardless, we enjoyed it immensely. The game's opening used a nice rendition of the movie's theme music, lending the action some authenticity. The core gameplay was solid and challenging, to the point I don't remember getting past the fourth or fifth mission.

I do remember, though, the infamous landing sequence and the bragging rights that came with consistently landing the F-14 on the carrier deck instead of just exploding in the water. That part of the game was legitimately stressful and nerve racking (note: it still is), and now, after working as a game developer, I've come to suspect that there was certainly some kind of "dice roll" occurring under the hood to determine your success regardless of how precisely you followed the on screen instructions during the sequence—the margin of error for your plane's altitude and airspeed never seems to be the same twice. I thought it was funny that, while the aerial combat was more engaging when played with a joystick controller like the Advantage or Quickshot, landing felt easier with the d-pad. —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

QUIRKY PUBLISHING

Top Gun: The Second Mission

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

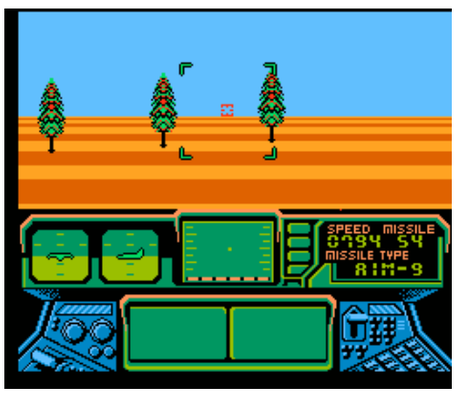


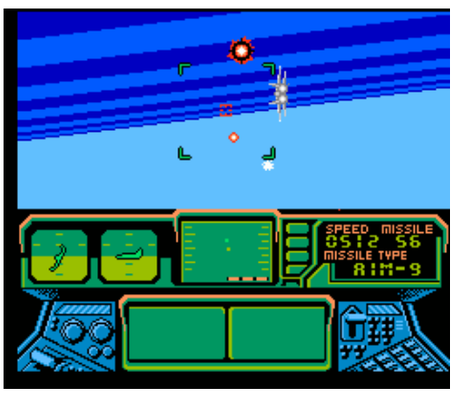
Top Gun: The Second Mission once again puts you in the cockpit of an F-14 Tomcat, but there are two game modes not found in the original *Top Gun*. You can now battle it out against an opponent via split screen action or one on one against the "enemy's finest pilots." Standard missions include Destroy Enemy Bomber, Destroy Top Secret Helicopter, and Destroy Enemy Space Shuttle. You'll shoot down tanks, submarines, fighters, choppers, and other enemies while flying to the ultimate destination: the aircraft carrier at the end of the level. You are given unlimited bullets, plus three types of missiles: phoenix, sparrow, and sidewinder, each varying in quantity and power. Your HUD (heads up display) shows such readouts as damage, speed, missiles remaining, and the level and orientation of your plane. As in the first *Top Gun*, you must land your plane (on the aforementioned aircraft carriers), but this time it's quite a bit easier. The game is fairly common, but not iconic and ubiquitous like the original *Top Gun*.

Notable Quotable:
"This is an amazing looking game—a real stomach churner. But it's so flippin' tough your stomach will be churning for the wrong reason." —*Total!!* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Everything in *Top Gun: The Second Mission* except the landing is more intense and more extreme with lots of flicker. The music is really good . . . The combat is just absurd. After the first two or three waves there's no guessing at all. It's all straight memorization. The enemies come at you from exactly the same spot each time and shoot you so quickly . . . that takes pretty much all the fun out of the game." —80s Comics (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"The original *Top Gun* game wasn't all that bad—but this is terrible. The 3D effect is blocky, jerky, unconvincing, and off-putting, and the sprites are badly drawn and dull; the sound, what there is of it, is enough to make you rip your ears off, and worst of all the gameplay is awful. The collision detection is ropey to say the least, and the poor perspective makes it impossible to judge how far away incoming missiles are, let alone dodge them. The 'versus' mode adds little lasting appeal as it is laughably simplistic, an average battle lasting about seven seconds. *Top Gun 2* could and should have been a lot better—fans of the original are bound to be very disappointed." —*Mean Machines* (November 1991)

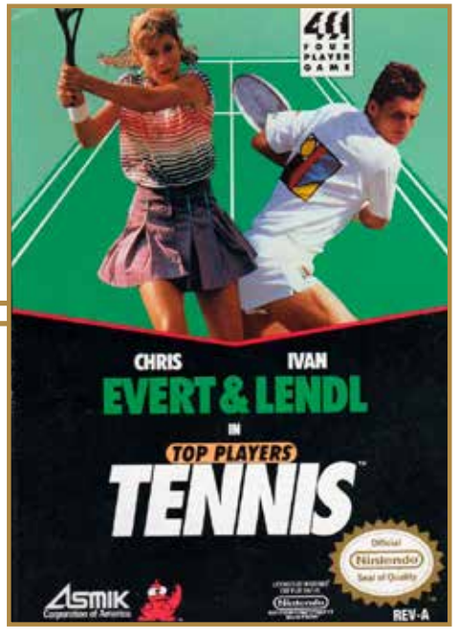


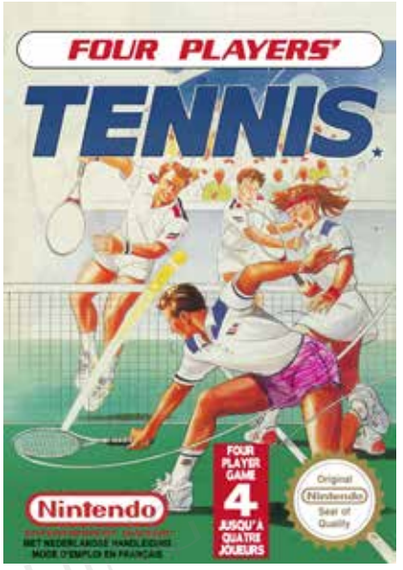


© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Top Players' Tennis, Chris Evert & Ivan Lendl in

PUBLISHER: Asmik.
DEVELOPER: Home Data.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Tennis, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



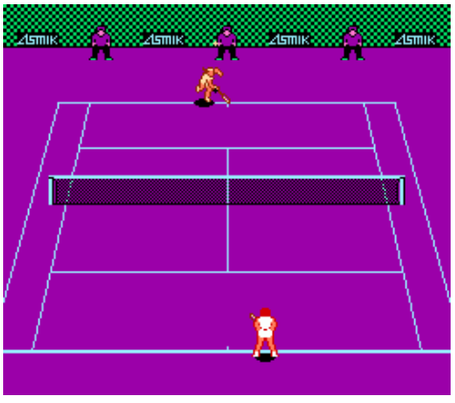


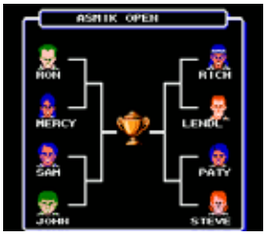
Featuring two of the greatest tennis players of the 1980s as playable characters, *Top Players' Tennis* is a relatively ambitious simulation of the popular sport. Gamers can pull off lots of hits and moves, including top spin, side spin, lob, fast and slow serve, slice, ground stroke volley, smash, backhand, forehand, dive, and jump. Holding the button in increases the strength of the shot, while striking the ball away from the body has a different effect than striking it close to the body. Miracle plays are available as well (adding a fantasy element to the game), such as the ball splitting into multiple balls, returning the ball without even touching it, or a ball being returned at super high velocity. Three courts are available (hard, clay, and grass), and winning matches lets players upgrade the strength, speed, agility, stamina, skill, ball spin, focus, and miracle power of their created character. Digitized voice effects call the game in limited fashion, saying such things as "fault" and "30-love." Titled *World Super Tennis* in Japan and *Four Players' Tennis* in Europe.

Memories: Back in the '80s I loved playing tennis, and I still enjoy it from time to time. I haven't watched tennis on television since those days, but I was a big fan of Chris Evert, who was Chris Evert Lloyd from 1979 to 1987 (during her marriage to British tennis player John Lloyd). Evert had an epic rivalry with Martina Navratilova, and I would always root for Evert, not only because she was cute, but I also liked her personality and play style. I really do need to track down a boxed copy of *Top Players' Tennis* for my collection. It would look great with my copy of *One-on-One Basketball* (Atari 7800) featuring Dr. J (my favorite athlete of all time) and Larry Bird.

Notable Quotable:

"Due to poor gameplay, mediocre graphics, and the lack of a high fun factor, *Top Players' Tennis* turned out to be one huge lesson in frustration . . . observes the fact that each court has a different surface where the ball will bounce differently . . . unfortunately they went a little overboard when showing these differences . . . opponents become too difficult too quickly. It's quite easy to beat the first opponent, but you'll find that the second opponent is at a much higher skill level than your character, even with the upgrades to stats made possible by winning the first match . . . the game controls are absolutely merciless. If your touch isn't perfect the ball will either rocket way out of bounds or flutter weakly into the net." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)





© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Total Recall

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Interplay Productions.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

The victim of a virtual vacation to Mars gone wrong, everyman Douglas Quaid must battle his way through such areas as city streets, subways, a cement factory, and interplanetary terminals. In addition to punching and firing at enemy thugs, dogs, little people, and special agents, Quaid can run, jump on platforms, crouch under enemy bullets, enter doors, and climb ladders. Helpful items to grab include energy canisters, a handgun, a machine gun, and lasers. Throughout the game Quaid must avoid Richter at all costs—you cannot defeat him. In a special Martian Transit Hub, which is a top-down maze of sorts that scrolls, Quaid commandeers a vehicle that drops land mines and shoots other cars. The game has some interesting moments, such as when Quaid walks behind an x-ray machine and when he must battle his own wife, but the action is poorly executed overall. Mars doesn't look otherworldly, and the music and sound effects have the generic (if competent) quality of a typical, hastily put together movie tie-in title. Based on the 1990 film of the same name (which in turn was based on Philip K. Dick's 1966 short story, *We'll Remember It for You Wholesale*), *Total Recall* is playable, and there's certainly plenty of action—enemies and projectiles come at you from all angles—but the controls and rhythm of the game have a clumsy feel that makes it less than entertaining.

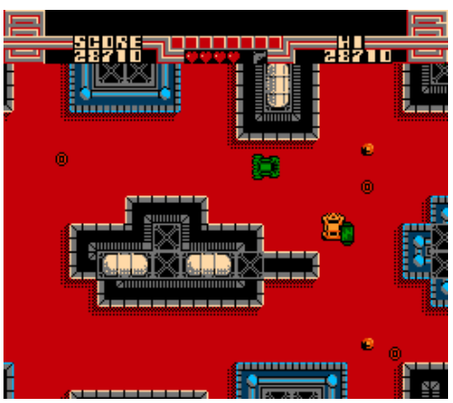
Memories: Everyone remembers the bar scene in the *Total Recall* film featuring the girl with three breasts and Arnold Schwarzenegger's one-liners (Arnie played Quaid), but the movie is much more than some funny and quirky scenes. It's an entertaining mind bender with terrific action sequences and special effects. The game, on the other hand, is just one of many lousy movie tie-ins for the NES.

Notable Quotable:

"Pretty boring game made from a pretty dumb movie. The fighting is imprecise because the figures are clunky, and the action is dull and repetitious." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games 4* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"NES video games just hit a new low. *Total Recall* is a total bore that has substandard graphics and none of the action found in the movie. The whole thing comes off like a bad dream, with hardly any fun to be found . . . The movie was cool, but the game is a horrible adaptation." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1990)

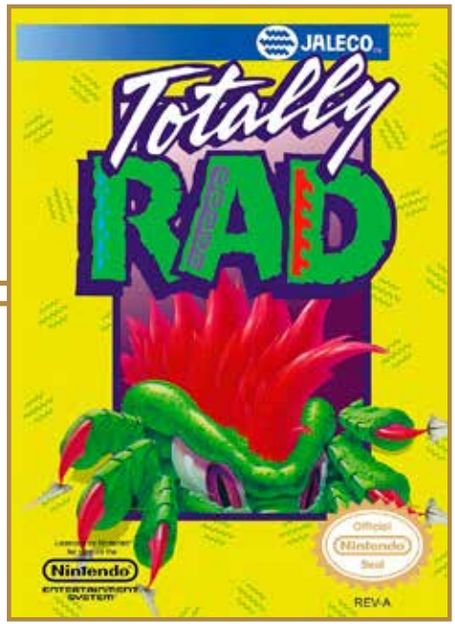


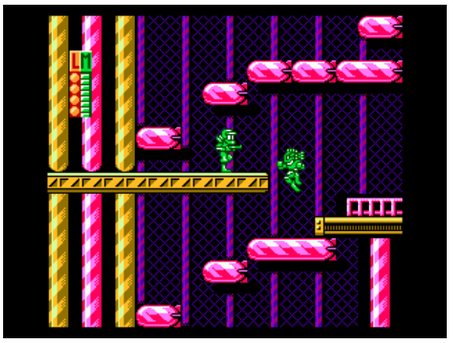
Insider Insight: I remember looking forward to renting *Total Recall* for the NES after I had watched the movie with my father (who sent me out of the room during a certain three-breasted moment). I had seen it in the store previously, but only after watching the sci-fi thriller did I get the itch to try the game. Starting the game offered a chuckle, as the first stage really did have a gloryhole-filled fence with prodding projectiles as an early foe. I managed to pass through the apartment battle in time with no problems, a section that trips up most of the game reviewers. The x-ray scene being done on the NES was a cool touch. As a kid I never made it past the level that resembled a decrepit building with the homeless people in it. I revisited the game as an adult, though, buying the game in an NES lot auction with 50 other games, and managed to beat it using a guide. There were some cool touches, such as the Martian base where windows get shot out and can suck you onto the barren Martian landscape, or controlling a Martian taxi in an overhead view dodging fire. While the game is often critically panned, it does stay loyal to the movie. —Chris Leathco, blogger at Retro Gaming Roundup, author of *Afterglow* and *The Virtual Boy Game Library*

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Totally Rad

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Aicom.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



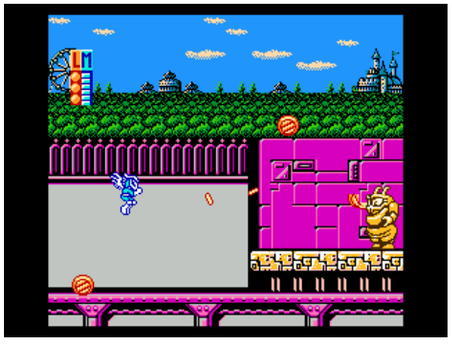


Totally Rad is a product of its time, using such dated (in the contextual sense) lingo as "gnarly" and "bodacious." The game puts players in control of a "most unprecedented regular dude" named Jake, an apprentice magician and "surfer dude" who battles aliens, robots, and monsters with a projectile attack that can be powered up by pressing the B button. Jake runs, jumps, and shoots through 12 levels of play: Amusement Park, Under the Big Top, City Streets, Sewers, City Streets Revisited, Dark Forest, River of Danger, Behind the Waterfall, Entrance to the Underground World, Caves of the Underground World, City at the Core of the Earth, and Lava Palace of Edogy. As in *Mega Man*—a similar game—the action moves vertically as well as horizontally. Jake can use 12 types of magic, enabling him to do the following: increase his life gauge; become temporarily invulnerable; weaken, freeze, or eliminate all onscreen enemies; or transform into a lion (for jumping higher), an eagle (for flying), or a fish (for swimming). These transformation sequences are cool, as are the cutscenes and the huge, colorful bosses. A playable platformer with a bogus instruction manual—I dare you to read the "totally righteous" storyline.

Notable Quotable:
"Even the best gamers will find the techniques involved in this cart to be challenging and satisfying. The graphics are good and the music is upbeat. Those end bosses will knock your socks off, as they are usually a full screen tall!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Good looking graphics make Jake's adventure a pleasant one featuring rich, brilliant colors. Parts of the scenery scroll by at different speeds in some areas; not with the pronounced depth you see in the arcades, but using enough to trick your eye with a nice pseudo-3D effect . . . The biggest problem with *Totally Rad* is the hackneyed dialogue that appears on the screen during the intermissions." —*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (April 1991)

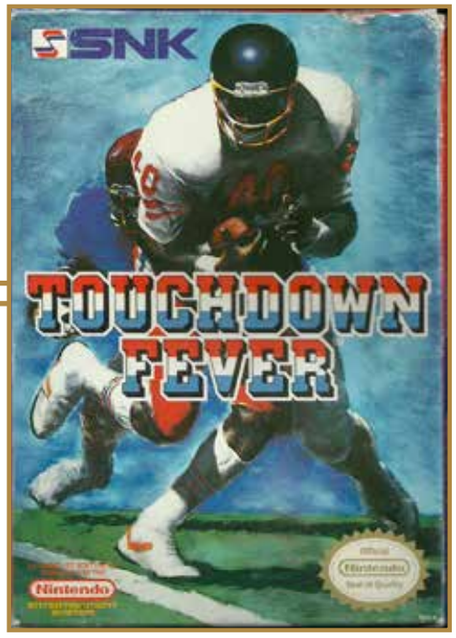
Notable Quotable:
"Looks and smells like a *Mega Man* knockoff . . . you can only charge when standing still, and not immediately after firing. You have to be standing still, and holding the B button will not fire the pellet first. It may be nitpicking, but it definitely disrupts the more natural and understood flow of *Mega Man* titles . . . The graphics are pretty mediocre, and the music is really drab and depressing for a game that is supposed to be gnarly and excellent. While the gameplay is certainly functional, you'll play this all the while wishing you were playing a fine tuned selection from the *Mega Man* series." —Mark Freedman (gamecola.net)

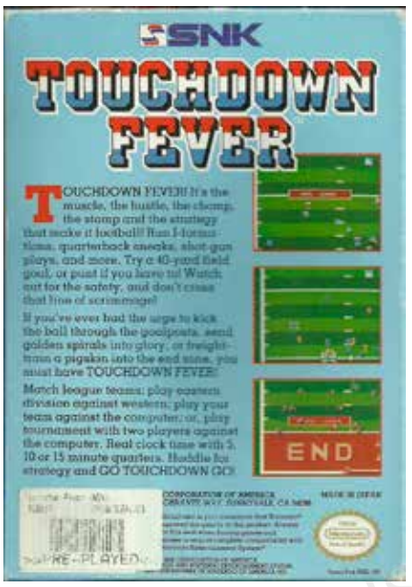


SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Touchdown Fever

PUBLISHER: SNK.
DEVELOPER: SNK.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.





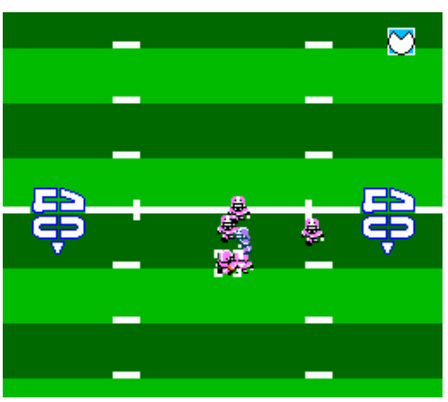
Unlike SNK's critically acclaimed *Baseball Stars*, *Touchdown Fever* fails to deliver a great rendition of its respective sport. The players are small and slow, there are no selectable defensive formations, forward passes are always allowable, and interceptions are far too easy to throw. The game includes 12 teams from NFL cities (six from the East, six from the West) but no licensed teams or players. There are six offensive plays/formations from which to choose: long pass, short pass, handoff, quarterback sneak, I-formation, and shotgun. You can play against the computer or a friend, or team up with a friend against the computer, which is nice. The typical trappings of American football apply, including first downs, field goals, punts, touchdowns, safeties, extra points, two-point conversions, laterals, and turnovers. The top-down action moves vertically, but scrolls some to the side to show the entire field. Based on SNK's 1987 arcade game.

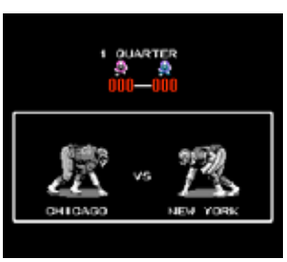
Notable Quotable:

"None of the plays affect gameplay in the slightest. Passing works okay, but regardless of what team you pick, or what team the opposing side picks, it's nearly impossible to make any progress . . . Interceptions are where *Touchdown Fever* really shines. Any team—yours or the computer's—can intercept with the greatest of ease, which means you'll constantly be switching sides back and forth. Even if these annoyances had been dealt with *Touchdown Fever* is a mediocre football title." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

"The field's portions are way off. A single yard is the equivalent of three yards in any other football game . . . Imagine having to gain 30 yards for a first down. You have no choice but to select 'long pass' for every play. The players are short and squat, which makes sense considering the overhead view. But what is the point of having the camera pan all the way left and right before each play? The controls are a mess . . . I actually witnessed three interceptions during a single play . . . The music that plays throughout is quite good . . . it speaks volumes when you play a game called *Touchdown Fever* with a friend and neither one of you even sniffs the end zone for the entire game!" —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)





SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Town & Country Surf Designs: Wood & Water Rage

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Atlus/Sanritsu Denki.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Skating/Surfing, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1988.

As the title suggests, *Wood & Water Rage* is two games in one. The "Wood" in the title refers to the Street Skate Session. In this mode of play you, as either Joe Cool or Tiki Man, ride a skateboard to the right down a side-scrolling street, dodging and jumping over hazards. If you fall into the ocean or into a crack in the street, or if you crash into a rolling oil drum, baseball, or other obstacle, you lose Life Symbols. Oil slicks spin you out of control for a couple of seconds while torn up sections of the road slow you down. You can score points by jumping on a turtle, a ball, or a toy car, as well as jumping over certain barriers, jumping from ramps, and jumping onto and along the upper guard rail. If you run out of Life Symbols or if the clock winds down to zero the game is over. The "Water" refers to the Big Wave Encounter. Here you surf, as either Thrilla Gorilla or Kool Kat, a hazardous pipeline. The longer you stay up the more turns you make; the more bananas you collect the higher your score will be. The game is over when you lose all your Life Symbols. There is a third option titled "Wood & Water Rage," but it is simply a combination of the first two modes of play. The title of the game refers to surfboard retailer Town & Country Surf Designs, an unusual license for a game.

Memories: Prior to playing *Wood & Water Rage* back in the day, I was prepared not to like it. Simulated surfing and skateboarding—these activities, I assumed, were not suited to the video game world, at least when compared to the more obvious thrills of motorcycle or speedboat racing. I was half right in my initial skepticism; the surfing mode of this game is not a total waste of time, but it can get dull and monotonous after a few tries.

I was wrong about the Street Skate Session, though. While not great, it is a legitimately enjoyable and challenging gaming experience. There's a nice variety of obstacles to jump over and avoid, forcing you to stay on your toes at all times, especially when going fast. Also the controls are responsive to the touch. You can easily pull nifty stunts on your board such as riding the guardrails, jumping while holding your skateboard, and jumping while the skateboard stays rolling along the street. One complaint I have is the graphic redundancy. While the objects and characters look pretty decent, the backgrounds and the streets get overly familiar pretty fast.

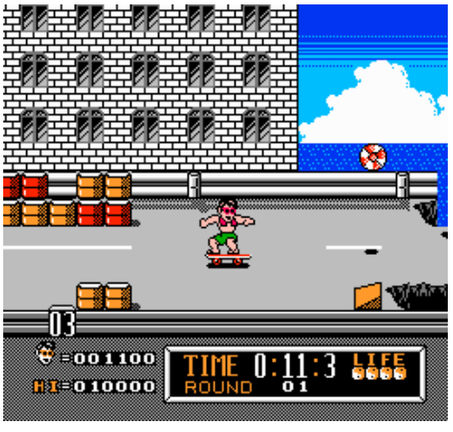
The sound is equally good in both games. The music, though repetitive, never gets old—it's got a rocking beat. The sound effects are pretty good, too. The ocean waves may not look particularly convincing but they sound real enough. And when you crash your skateboard, you may wince at the sound of your skin scraping on the asphalt. *Wood & Water Rage* was a popular game upon release, especially at rental stores, which is where I discovered it.

Notable Quotable:

"Very good animation in the characters and their boards as they jump and skate their way through a series of maneuvers . . . this is an uneven cartridge with a good skateboarding sequence and a surprisingly static session in the waves." —*Computer Entertainer* (March 1988)

Notable Quotable:

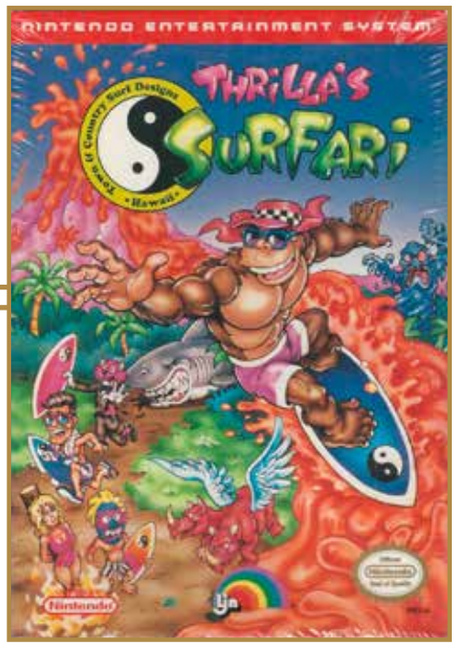
"We spent far too much time with this game when it came out in 1988, and it's one of those few titles that is just as fun as it was at release . . . tosses just enough randomness at you to keep it fun and entertaining. If you want to laugh at your siblings or coworkers when they try not to fail the surfing side puts the 'sado' back in sadomasochist. Even better, let the others play the surfing part and hog the skateboarding for yourself—not that we've done that. T&C Surf Designs was quite happy with this game when it came out and promoted it heavily. Counting on nostalgia, they even brought back Thrilla Gorilla and Da Boys as a set of retro T-shirts and stickers in 2016." —Bradly Robbins (retronuke.com/town)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Town & Country II: Thrilla's Surfari

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1992.



Thrilla's Surfari abandons the extreme sports angle of its progenitor, *Wood & Water Rage*, in favor of platforming action. As Thrilla Gorilla, players must skateboard through lush, beautifully rendered jungles of Africa, jumping ramps and dodging and leaping over such obstacles as logs, pits, and rocks. Many of the enemies you'll encounter, such as rhinos and cobras, can be jumped on. The action goes downhill and scrolls to the right, then left, then back again. You can grab diamonds to make you invincible (amusingly you'll ride upside down on your board via handstand), bananas for extra health, and coconuts to unlock bonus shell games (for winning extra lives). You'll also ride a surfboard down rivers. Gameplay here is much the same as the more predominant skateboarding areas, but scenes where you ride a shark underwater while firing banana spears at sea life are different. There are seven multi-area levels of play (33 stages total), each with a different boss, such as The Killer Rhino, Huge Killer Scorpion, Older Brother of Evil Shark, or Immense Lava Monster. You can throw coconuts and bananas at the bosses. This is a fast and fun game with gorgeous graphics, cool music, high jumps, and responsive controls.

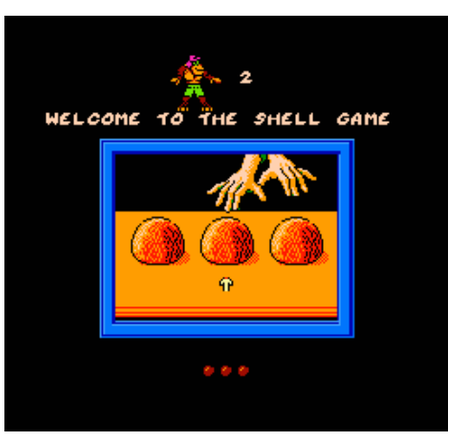
Notable Quotable:

"This jungle trek is more challenging than the original . . . skating sessions are fast knuckle-crunchers. The moves are basic leaps and ollies, and they're all controlled by one button. Speed determines the style and height of your jump . . . some seriously thrilling surfing . . . a pleasant surprise. The action's challenging, but controllable. The smoothly scrolling graphics and pretty scenery look 8-bit great, and even the sounds aren't bad. *T & C II* is tough, but as Thrilla himself sez, 'If it swells, ride it!'" —*GamePro* (May 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The backgrounds are bright, detailed, and quite colorful. I just love the jungle levels, as well as the waterfall levels. There are some levels that could have been better in detail, like the deserts . . . The obstacles are varied, as well as the enemies. The bosses are plain HUGE, and quite comical in appearance . . . great animations that are funny . . . I love the first desert level's music, as well as the boss music . . . there is nothing new the second or third time around . . . the only thing that will keep you coming back is the originality of the game and its difficulty, which is much higher than average." —Alain Garamonde (gamefaqs.gamespot.com)

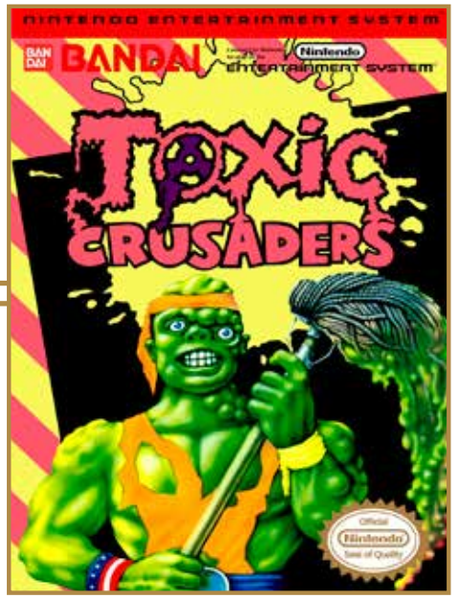
Memories: I was shocked by how good this game was when I rented it at the local video store back in 1988. Not only that, I liked the "GO APE!" advertising slogan because it was the same one used for my all-time favorite film series, *Planet of the Apes*.



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Toxic Crusaders

PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



The evil Dr. Killemoff has kidnapped Toxie's girlfriend Yvonne and the rest of the Toxic Crusaders, spurring Toxie the superhero/sludge monster into action. As Toxie you can punch enemies and hit them with your mop, which can be powered up to shoot projectiles or be thrown like a boomerang. If he's damaged by enemies, Toxie will lose his mop and can only punch. You must work your way through six levels of play: the streets of Tromaville, Tromaville High School, Tromaville Factory, Tromaville Highway, Tromaville Sewer, and Island City. You'll battle Boss Polluto, free Headbanger, swim, trudge through the sewer, jump over gaps and radioactive waste, bounce off springs, dodge and destroy barrels, skateboard down the highway, avoid bricks and spikes, battle a plethora of Dr. Killemoff's henchmen (some of which fly, some of which shoot projectiles), and much more. Based on the 1991 pro-environment cartoon series, which in turn was based on Troma's *The Toxic Avenger* feature film from 1984.

Notable Quotable:

"Bandai *Toxic Crusaders* is one of those games you should avoid unless you're a Troma fan. If you're down with Lloyd and his zany sense of humor you may be delighted by some of Troma's signature moves appearing in the game. For example, finding a bag of kitty litter gives Toxie more power at the end of the level when he battles the henchman. Crazy stuff abounds!" —8-Bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The biggest problem with this game is that it's just too hard. I beat *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, why can't I do this? . . . The bad guys, they just keep coming. The thing I hate about beat-'em-up games like this is you have to kill everybody you see. The screen stops moving until you clear all the enemies. It's not like in *Kung Fu*, where you can just keep moving ahead . . . It wouldn't be such a problem if the entire floor wasn't covered in toxic waste at these awkward diagonal slants so your jumping has to be very precise." —The Angry Video Game Nerd (YouTube)

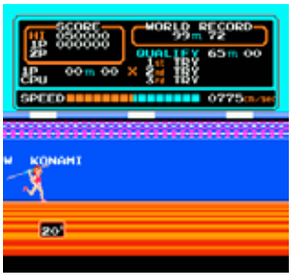
Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are very good, with some really nice touches, and the music is well above average. The gameplay is decent and becomes much more enjoyable once you've played for a while and gotten used to the controls, particularly the fact that Toxie stops for a moment after you've attacked. I have to give the developer kudos for at least trying to make the game more interesting by adding in some different gameplay styles . . . *TC*'s biggest failing is definitely the difficulty level . . . poor hit detection . . . tendency for enemies to appear right where you're standing." —VGJunk (retrovania-vgjunk.blogspot.com)

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Track & Field

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Track & Field, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.



Track & Field for the NES includes five of the six events found in Konami's original 1983 arcade game: 100 Meter Dash, Long Jump, 110 Meter Hurdles, Javelin Throw, and High Jump. Hammer Throw is missing, but the cartridge does feature three extra events: Skeet Shooting, Triple Jump, and Archery. In events that involve running, the faster you press the A button the faster your runner will go, making for some furious button mashing. Press the control pad to control the timing and angle of jumps, shots, and throws. In Archery you should take wind into account when firing at the moving targets. The 100 Meter Dash and 100 Meter Hurdles are timed events, but Archery and Skeet Shooting require a minimum score for you to qualify. Javelin Throw, Long Jump, Triple Jump, and High jump require you to reach a certain height or distance. If you qualify in all the events they repeat, but get more difficult. Or you can simply practice single events over and over. You can challenge a friend or play against the computer as a novice or an expert, and you can choose which event you'd like to play first, with the others following in order. "Chariots of Fire" plays as the opening theme.

Notable Quotable:

"The first several times you attempt some of these events you'll probably find yourself committing a number of fouls as you get a feel for your timing . . . This is good, diversified sports action . . . with clear and well-colored graphics." —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"Despite coming up slightly short in the 8-bit Olympics, *Track & Field* is still a decent multi-sports title and succeeds as an arcade port as well. Komani did a commendable job in bringing the arcade classic to the NES and fans of the original will feel at home here. Even though *Gold Medal Challenge* does offer a better Olympic experience, if you just want simple arcade action on the track then *Track & Field* still deserves a spot on your medal podium." —NES Times (formerly at www.nestimes.net)

Insider Insight: My brother Greg and I played the heck out of *Track & Field* when it came out. He was a drummer and would apply his drumming skills to video games like this. To achieve the proper setup he would tape the NES controller to a heavy *Encyclopedia of Animals* book. This allowed him to use both hands to frantically tap away on the B and A buttons while keeping the controller from sliding away.

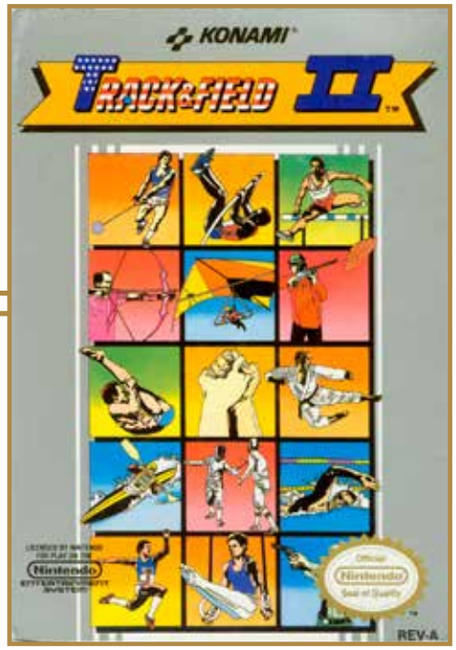
We were pretty evenly matched in terms of sheer button pressing. I had a method where I used only my index finger and would get the world records on all of the speed based events. I recently measured my finger-tapping speed with a DSi/3DS app called 6 Shot Shooting Watch and was able to achieve 12 presses per second (120 total presses in 10 seconds). The world record was 16 times a second, for a total of 160 in 10 seconds. This was held by Takahashi Meijin, a.k.a. Master Higgins, a former executive at Hudson Soft in Japan. When he tried again publicly in 2005 he only got to 12.3 shots per second. With more practice could I possibly become the Master?!

I thought my brother's method of taping the NES controller to a large book was a bit ridiculous, but a few years later an actual NES accessory did the same thing! It was the NES Speedboard, released by Pressman in 1991. This peripheral held the NES controller in a large plastic mat. It was endorsed by NASCAR driver Kyle Petty, but really it should have been endorsed by my brother. —Matt Henzel, founder of VideoGameObsession.com

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Track & Field II

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Track & Field, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.



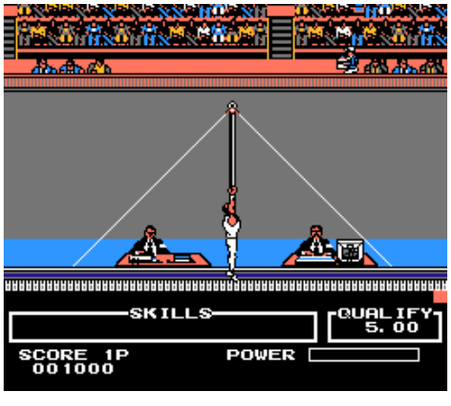
Track & Field II has better graphics and more elaborate controls than the first game, plus a wider variety of events. These include Fencing (thrust your sword and block your opponent's thrusts), Triple Jump, Freestyle Swimming, High Diving, Clay Pigeon Shooting, The Hammer Throw, Taekwondo (attack, retreat, jump, duck, punch, kick), The Pole Vault, Canoeing (paddle quickly through 16 gates), Archery, The Hurdles, The Horizontal Bar (rotate, twist, stand, halt, and jump on bar), Hang Gliding (if sailing at the proper speed you automatically land on the target), Pistol Shooting (first-person shooter compatible with the Zapper light gun), and Arm Wrestling. Less emphasis is placed on fast button pushing than in *Track & Field*, though that is certainly a factor in several of the games, so prepare to get tired after extensive play. Once again, the timing of button presses is crucial for doing well. Modes of play include Championship, VS., and Training, the latter of which lets you practice every event but Arm Wrestling, Hang Gliding, and Pistol Shooting. Includes opening and closing ceremonies and the athletes landing at the airport.

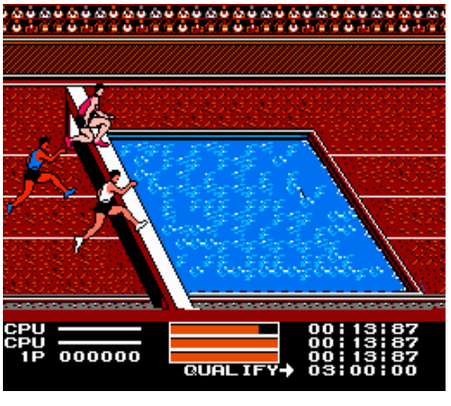
Notable Quotable:
"Combining the splash page close-up action shots of *Double Dribble* with the button mashing fury of the original *Track & Field*, this 1988 sports omnibus was a crucial postscript to the 1988 Seoul Olympics for every starry-eyed kid who loved video games and Greg Louganis in equal measure." —Garrett Martin (www.pastemagazine.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Individually none of the contests is as exciting as games devoted to just one sport. However, the pressure of having to triumph progressively in many different sports will satisfy most videogamers. This is also a terrific party cartridge . . . The music is repetitious and silly." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Each event requires a good deal of skill and judgement, as well as practice if you are to score maximum points . . . will keep you busy for ages . . . no corners have been cut on any of the games, either graphically or sonically. Living proof that you can get just as much game onto a cartridge as you can onto a couple of three-and-a-half-inch disks . . . A must for sports sim fans." —*Advanced Computer Entertainment* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"There's no getting away from sore fingers in the sequel. Graphically and sonically the game is great, with some surprisingly detailed sprites running, jumping, and performing seemingly impossible acrobatic feats. Sound consists of a pleasant tune, cheering (and sometimes jeering) crowds and spot effects that create a great atmosphere. Two players make the product even more playable." —*The Games Machine* (May 1990)

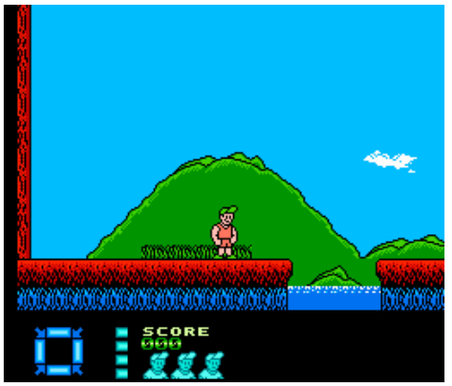




SCANNER PUBLISHING

Treasure Master

PUBLISHER: American Softworks.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



In *Treasure Master* you, as a dude named Scooter dressed in orange clothes and a green hat, begin the game with no ability to attack. You can only walk, crouch, swim, climb, and jump. However, after a short time you can find radium-plated boots that let you kick your enemies. You'll discover a variety of other useful items as well, such as bombs for destroying certain walls and platforms, a hard hat to protect against overhead spikes, a bow and arrow that fires a climbing rope, and construction potion for building bridges. You'll explore various exotic locations, including islands, the microchips inside a Nintendo Entertainment System (!), and the moon, where you can ride a moon buggy and find a ray gun for blasting enemies. You'll also pilot a submarine. Cosmic caterpillars, sonic saucers, solar road hogs, blitz blimps, monster sharks, and other creatures populate the levels, which incorporate some odd design choices. For example some gaps look lethal, but jumping into them sends you swimming below ground. Also you can enter what look like solid mushrooms.

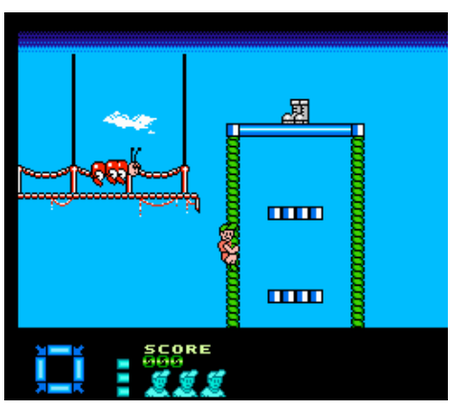
Memories: Back in the day *Treasure Master* was promoted with a contest where a password was given out on MTV that would allow players to reach a secret world where you could possibly win real-world prizes. Two top prize winners could select a Fantasy Rock Concert, a Fantasy Sports Event, a Fantasy Audio/Video Room, or $10,000. Two hundred fifty second-place winners each won a Super Nintendo console.

Notable Quotable:

"*Treasure Master* has good animation, and the graphics are colorful and clean, although unspectacular. Coupled with decent sound effects and OK music, the game keeps you hooked even if you aren't playing for the moola." —*GamePro* (January 1992)

Notable Quotable:

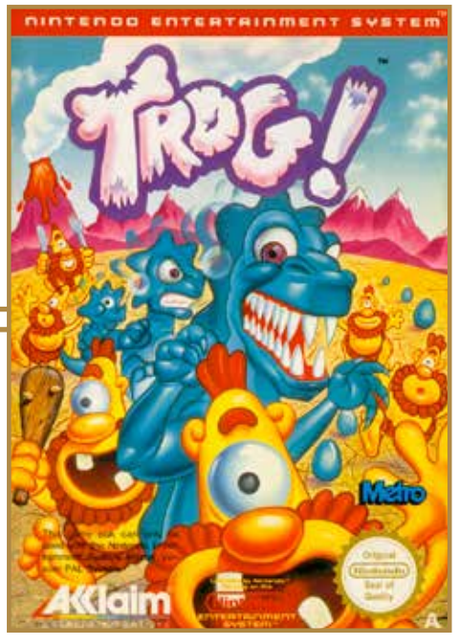
"Each level takes place in a large environment that goes up and down multiple screens. In the first level alone you can climb high above the ground or swim with the sharks below the surface . . . You'll spend much of the adventure simply searching every nook and cranny for something useful. Unfortunately, it's not always clear when and where you're supposed to use each of these items. Usually this results in you aimlessly walking around trying to figure out what to do next . . . some of the game's trial and error can result in some frustrating and unfair deaths. One early situation has you jumping several screens into the air, only to hit a ceiling of spikes." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)



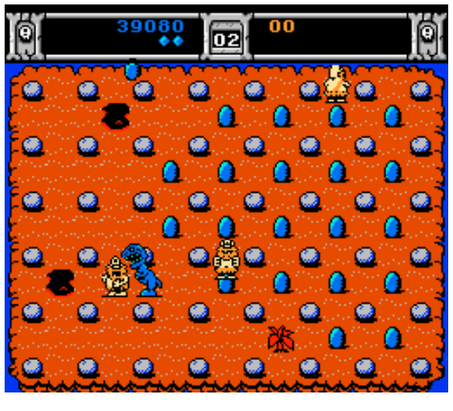
SCOOTER PUBLISHING

Trog!

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts.
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



Trog! is based on the 1990 Bally/Midway arcade game, which lacked the exclamation point in the title but offered a four-player mode and had more of a claymation look to the characters. In this excellent (if obscure) maze game, players guide a cartoonish dinosaur around a series of 50 nonscrolling island mazes, collecting eggs while avoiding Trogs (cavemen), fire, mushrooms (which slow the dinosaur down), tar pits, and holes. Unlike *Pac-Man* and other such titles, the hero in *Trog!* can punch its foes. In addition, the dinosaur can grab such items as ice cubes (for freezing Trogs), red flowers (for extra speed), and hot tamales (for breathing fireballs). The most enjoyable items to pick up are pineapples, which turn the dinosaur into a T-rex, enabling players to turn the tables on the pursuing cavemen and eat them. In later levels Trogs learn to jump, increasing the challenge. A hidden gem in the NES library.



Memories: I knew nothing of *Trog!* when it was released in 1991. I never saw it in a store and had never played the original arcade obscurity. I somehow managed to play the NES all through the nineties oblivious to the game, despite the fact that the maze genre is one of my favorites. I discovered the game after someone posted about it online around 15 years ago. I grabbed a copy off eBay for around $10 and it immediately became one of my favorites for the NES.

Notable Quotable:

"Pure magic! It's the best thing I've played on the NES for ages. Take the classic *Pac-Man* and combine it with some prehistoric characters and a few extra power-ups and you have *Trog!*—the ultimate two-player maze game . . . It's always the most simple games that get you totally addicted, and we're all addicted to this. Excellent gameplay coupled with some great presentation makes *Trog!* an essential purchase . . . Large, detailed, colorful sprites . . . A joy to play . . . Loads of levels to keep you interested." —*N-Force* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"*Trog!* has been unfairly admonished as being a *Pac-Man* rip-off. Someone please explain how a game with a slew of power-ups, more enemy attack behaviors, three unique bonus games, and more intricate level design can constitute being a 'rip-off.' Sure, the main idea is the same—in this case you play as a dino (Pac-Man) as you navigate through single screen mazes while robbing eggs (pellets) from one-eyed cavemen named Trogs (ghosts) who would like nothing more than a nice, juicy dino burger—but *Trog!* takes what made *Pac-Man* legendary and expands upon it." —Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Insider Insight: We got *Trog!* in the early '90s, shortly after it came out. I remember playing the game in the arcade and really liking it. All of the characters had a claymation look to them and it was a very smooth playing and fun game. The box art for the NES version really looked cool! I noticed that it supported two players and I couldn't wait to play this game with my wife, Susan.

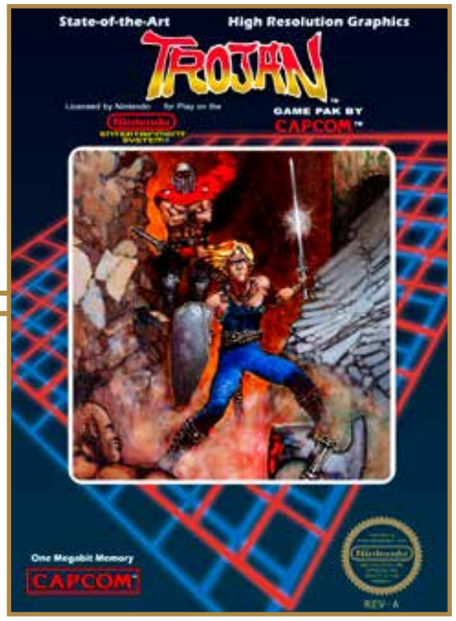
I was impressed with how closely the NES version looked and played like the original arcade game. Picking up the pineapple that turns you into a giant T-Rex was always fun. We'd try to play cooperatively so both of us could stay alive as long as possible. Whomever happened to be T-Rex would come over and help the other player get out of a tough jam. The game was very fun to play cooperatively. Hearing that "bonk/slap" sound when the cavemen hit you over the head was always a bummer, but sounded so funny; the animation of them having you for dinner was hilarious.

The Trog Feast bonus wave was always a favorite part of the game. Having both players running around and consuming as many cavemen as possible was a total blast. If you could get all of the cavemen that were issued within 25 seconds both players were awarded 100,000 points. It was always interesting to see who could eat the most Trogs that were issued out in that allotted time. The number of Trogs eaten was tallied up for both players and clearly displayed after the bonus round was over. —Steve Woita, video game designer and programmer

(C) SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Trojan

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Fighting, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.



A cartridge that can elicit Beavis and Butthead-type laughter because of its title ("Trojan" is the brand name for a type of condom), this game has players guiding a brave warrior through seven levels (including a dilapidated city, a jungle, and caves), hacking and slashing killer piranha, armadillo-like freaks, hatchet-wielding monsters, and knife-throwing creatures. If the Trojan warrior loses his fast action sword and highly maneuverable shield he must resort to punching and kicking. Hidden items, which players can find by slashing the sword around the areas, reveal higher jumps, keys for opening passages, faster walking speed, and more. The arcade version (Romstar/Capcom, 1986) has more detailed graphics, but the NES rendition has some interesting additions, such as a one-on-one fighting mode (which is simplistic but welcome) and the ability for players to enter manholes to explore sewers. Interestingly boots make players jump higher in the NES version while jumping zones are used in the arcade game.

Memories: During the Atari era I spent a lot of time playing video games in my friends' homes. Later I played a fair amount of ColecoVision and NES with my brother-in-law and my niece and nephew at my house. However, I did spend a heck of a lot of time playing solo on the NES (I hung out with plenty of friends but doing other stuff, like going to arcades and concerts). *Trojan* was an early title in my collection and I spent many hours playing and enjoying it all by my lonesome.

Notable Quotable:

"Another winner from Capcom . . . Plenty of depth and surprises, offering the same kind of challenge and play value that have made *Ghosts 'n Goblins* such a favorite with owners of the NES . . . Fans of action adventures won't want to miss *Trojan*." — *Computer Entertainer* (May 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"It's just a shame this game isn't endowed with any original or addictive qualities. Though limited in color and detail, backgrounds are adequate, scrolling smoothly, and there's some neat definition among the generally unremarkable sprites. Music grates and effects are weak little noises. Difficulty is set way too high . . . Other than a few unusual sprites *Trojan* is one big cliché. Gameplay is both highly predictable and highly aggravating—not worth the effort." —*The Games Machine* (December 1989)

Insider Insight: My friend Chris and I always called *Trojan* the "Safe Sex Game." It and *Section Z* were the first Capcom games I ever played, but I always wished *Trojan* had a different name. It's fun, but as an almost-teenage boy it was hard to take seriously. And you really hated to talk about it in front of adults. "Hey, have you played *Trojan*?" "What are you kids talking about over there?"

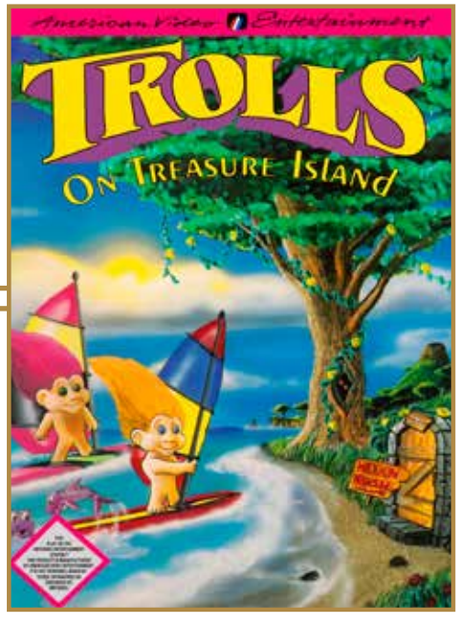
Despite its suggestive title, I really enjoyed my time learning all the ins and outs of the game (so to speak). In addition to being a good port of the arcade game (which I didn't even know existed until almost 20 years later), it was one of the first games I played that had a supplemental fighting style versus mode where you could play one-on-one against a friend in a best two-out-of-three battle.

The worst thing about *Trojan*, other than its title, is the controls. While it is nice to have one button that controls your sword and one for your shield, that leaves the jumping controls regulated to pushing up on the d-pad, and no one likes that. Once you learn how to play the game and know where all of the hidden power-ups are you can breeze through it in about 20 minutes, which is . . . Hmmm . . . maybe it was called *Trojan* for a reason. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Trolls on Treasure Island

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Michael and Cam Crick.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



Teenage Trolls Samantha and Norbert come upon a mysterious island. You guide one of the little doll creatures around the top-down, nonscrolling playfield to gather treasure (musical notes, rubies, sapphires, diamonds, and gold pirate coins), doing so in unusual fashion. The Trolls automatically run right and left, bouncing back the other direction when they hit an obstacle, and you press up or down to change their vertical position. You can also press a button to send them into hyper (fast) mode. Trolls can only collect treasures (by bouncing off them) and pass through doors that are the same color as their hair. To change hair color the Troll must touch a bucket of hair coloring. Destroying certain blocks reveals hidden gems. When you've collected all the treasures it reveals an exit you should pass through. After a short time obstacles begin showing up, including creatures, sand, ice (which you can walk over with boots), water (which you can cross with a boat), and hot embers. With a second player you can either compete or work as a team. *Trolls on Treasure Island* is essentially the same game as *Dudes with Attitude*, but the Trolls have replaced the smiley faces and there are some different puzzles. Unlicensed and rare.

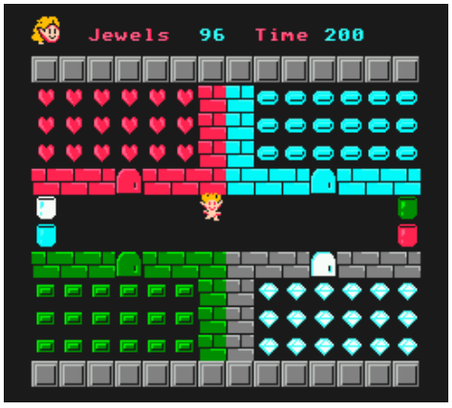
SCANLINE PUBLISHING

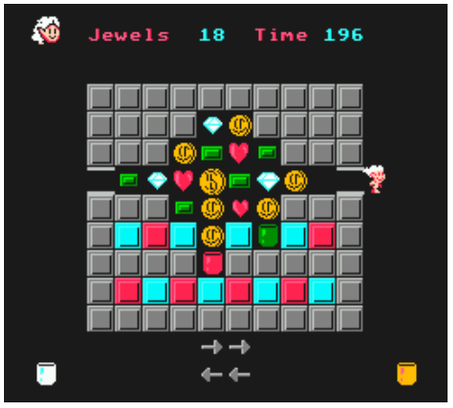
Notable Quotable:

"Do you like staring at large spaces of black, peppered by indecipherable blobs that have as much objective significance as a Pollock painting? Do you like listening to the high-pitched giggle of a smug blob of pixels as it refuses to listen to any of your commands? If you answered 'yes,' allow me to suggest a career in a self-flagellating sect of the priesthood. But don't play *Trolls* . . . so spiffily avant garde that it eschews having a control scheme altogether" —Eileen Stahl (www.somethingawful.com)

Notable Quotable:

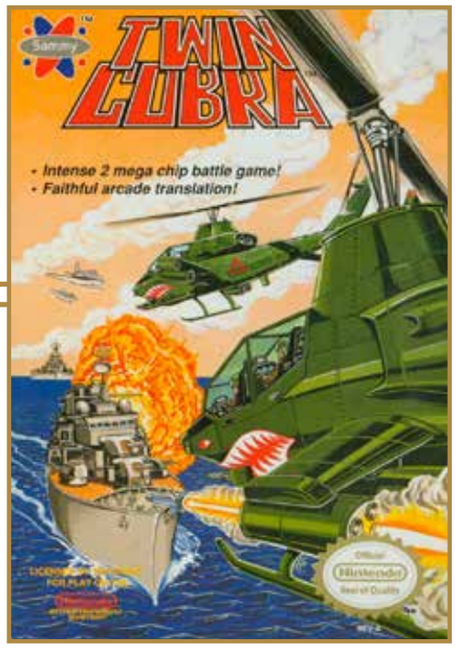
"Given their wide pop culture reach I'm a little surprised we didn't see more successful video games starring Troll dolls. It's even more remarkable that the Troll games we got often felt like crazy experiments gone horribly wrong. That certainly describes *Trolls on Treasure Island*, a bizarre puzzler that mixes nonsensical gem collecting with an uncontrollable mascot character . . . Although the basic gameplay doesn't change much over the course of 33 stages, AVE does keep things fresh with new obstacles and enemies. Sadly, the core concept is too flimsy to base an entire game on . . . presentation is poor . . . outdated visuals." —Cyril Lachel (www.defunctgames.com)

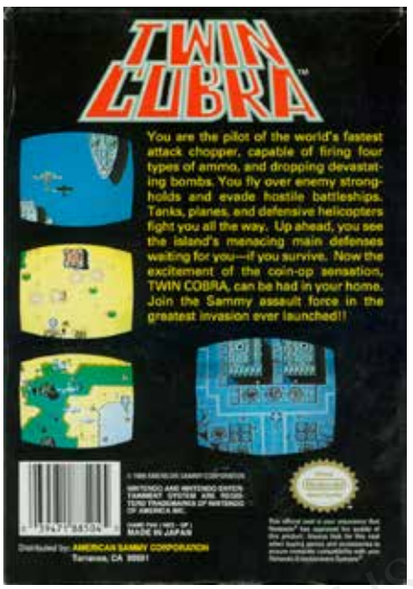




Twin Cobra

PUBLISHER: American Sammy.
DEVELOPER: Micronics.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

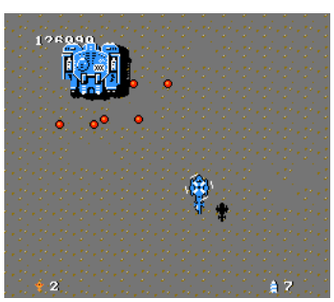


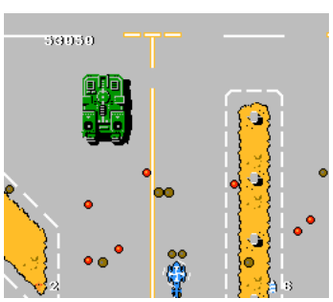


Twin Cobra puts you at the helm of a Cobra assault chopper, flying over 10 levels of land and sea (including military strongholds and naval flotillas), shooting and bombing helicopters, tanks, jets, attack vessels, combat barges, gun turrets, missile silos, bombers, and battleships. Capturing saucers changes the chopper's weaponry: missiles firing in parallel lines, guns firing in radial directions, double fire, and four-way fire. Saucers sometimes appear when you destroy transportation helicopters, bombers, or barges. S and B icons increase the power of the current weapon and the number of bombs (respectively). Your chopper starts with three bombs in reserve and can gain extras (up to nine in stock at once) by grabbing bomb pods. Like the more accurately emulated Genesis port, the NES game lacks the two-player option found in the original 1987 Taito/Romstar arcade game, which was the spiritual successor to *Tiger-Heli*.

Notable Quotable:
"*Twin Cobra* is above average thanks to several options like selecting different weapons and powering them up to incredible heights. The backgrounds are well-detailed and colorful, and the whole game is easy to play. *Twin Cobra* is better than most shooting games in this class." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"While owners of the Sega Genesis and the TurboGrafx-16 were treated to fantastic adaptations at the hands of extremely capable developers (the latter in Japan only), NES fans were not quite as lucky. Instead of tapping their in-house talent (Treco, a subsidiary of Sammy, ported the game themselves to the Sega Genesis in 1991), Sammy reacquainted gamers with infamous developer Micronics, renowned for their uncanny knack for maiming classic '80s coin-op games. Despite Micronics' well-earned reputation for producing software crippled by glitchy gameplay, repugnant aesthetics, and spiteful difficulty levels, *Twin Cobra* for the NES is not the unmitigated disaster that one might expect following such travesties as *Super Pitfall*, *Ikari Warriors*, and *Athena* . . . The helicopter responds smoothly to commands and the hit detection is generally accurate . . . Like with *Gradius* and *Abadox*, the penalty for making a mistake is severe: the guns are reset to the default weapon at its lowest power. This isn't a massive impediment for the first three-quarters of the game, since until stage seven the enemies move slowly, fire in predictable patterns, and are fairly easy to kill without sustaining any damage. After stage seven, however, the sudden extreme spike in difficulty makes a fully powered weapon essential." —NintendoComplete.com (www.nintendocomplete.com)

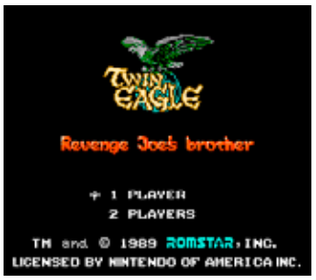




SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Twin Eagle

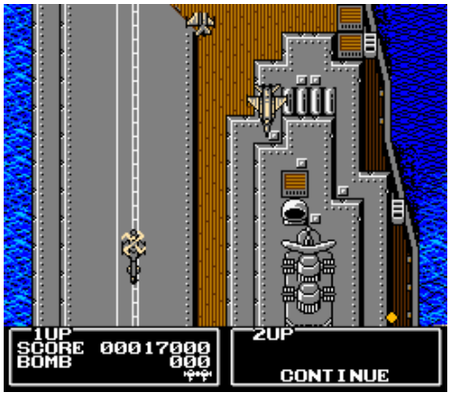
PUBLISHER: Romstar.
DEVELOPER: Visco.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.

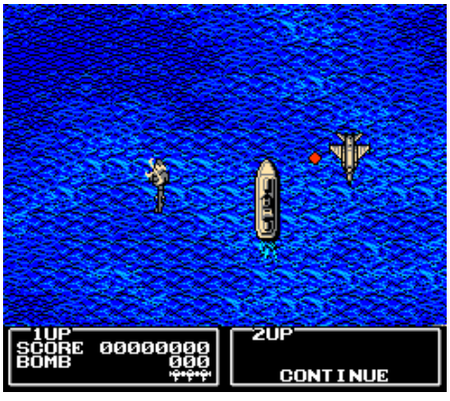


Twin Eagle is a fairly standard and certainly playable shooter that, like its coin-op counterpart (Taito, 1988), doesn't have any bosses (with the exception of the enemy fortress at the end of the game). The coin-op version has nine levels, while this port has just five, making it a much shorter game. You pilot a slow-moving helicopter over deserts, jungles, and seas, shooting helicopters and planes while dropping bombs on such ground-based enemies as boats, soldiers, tanks, and gun turrets. Destroying specific enemy strongholds emits hostages to rescue for bonus points. To take out certain ground targets you'll need to destroy buildings and trees. Power-ups you can grab include increased speed, screen-clearing bombs, and the following weapon upgrades: cannon ball, machine gun, missile, and two-way shot. Shooting the power-up icon changes it until you grab it. Grabbing the same power-up consecutively increases its power. According to the manual, the storyline has you on a mission to avenge the death of "Joe's Brother," who was shot down while on a mission to "protect our world from war and aggression." The subtitle of the game (NES and arcade) is "Revenge Joe's Brother," which appears on the title screen.

Notable Quotable:
"Your helicopter moves slowly, which is not all bad, since dodging these missiles requires some precision . . . graphics are plain and lack detail. Soldiers have huge heads, and the green ones look more like Martians. Instead of bosses, the end of each stage bombards you with high speed enemies. A limited number of continues are available. *Twin Eagle* is not a great one-player game, but the two-player mode drastically increases the fun factor." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:
"This thing is incredibly slow and, as such, difficult to avoid enemy bullets, especially in later stages . . . The graphics are not awful, but I've definitely seen better on the NES. The first level is colorful enough, being that it's all above water, but subsequent levels can look fairly bland . . . even with the water's bright palette the waves look like a glitchy mess . . . When you die you lose all your power-ups. Normally this wouldn't concern me . . . I can deal with the weapons being lost. But the fact that you lost all your bombs and your speed makes later levels nearly impossible to traverse before getting hit again . . . the power-ups block your shots . . . when multiple power-ups flood the screen they might block an entire shooting lane . . . In later levels you'll encounter horrific slowdown . . . It's not a bad game, but not really one you have to have in your collection." —Reaper00702 (YouTube)

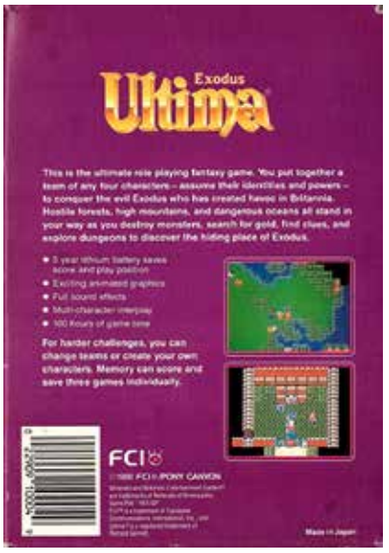




SCHILLER PUBLISHING

Ultima: Exodus

PUBLISHER: FCI.
DEVELOPER: Newtopia Planning.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



A port of the groundbreaking computer game, *Ultima III: Exodus* (1983), *Ultima: Exodus* was the first of three *Ultima* games for the NES (*Ultima I: The First Age of Darkness* and *Ultima II: The Revenge of the Enchantress* never made it to the 8-bit console). The game takes place after the defeat of Mondain and Minax, who gave birth to a child named Exodus, a vengeful being who has grown up and must be destroyed. From a list of five races (human, elf, dwarf, bobit, and fuzzy) and 11 professions (fighter, cleric, thief, wizard, paladin, barbarian, lark, illusionist, druid, alchemist, and ranger), players must create a party of four characters, each rated according to strength, dexterity, intelligence, and wisdom. The heroic quartet must travel the forests, mountains, oceans, castles, and mazelike dungeons of Sosaria, casting magical spells, talking to townsfolk, and purchasing weapons, tools, and armor. Monster battles are executed via a tactical, turn-based combat system in which the characters stand across from their opponents. Much of the action consists of selecting commands from text menus, such as give, get, climb, fight, direction, talk, and magic. Leveling up requires visiting Lord British, the ruler of Britannia, who will promote the character after they have gained enough experience. The back of the box says you'll get 100 hours of gameplay out of the cartridge. The *Ultima* series was created by Richard Garriott, who many fans call Lord British.

Notable Quotable:

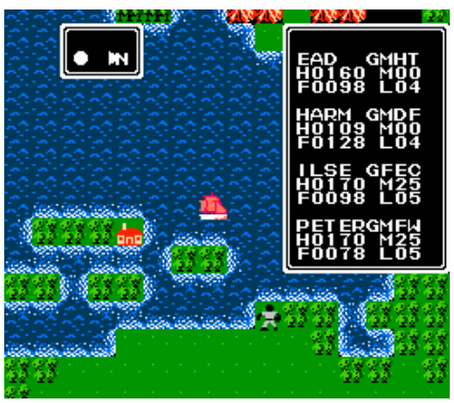
"*Ultima* is one of the ultimate role playing games for the NES, and one that should not be taken lightly. With its complex storyline and vast landscape, *Ultima* will draw you in and never let you go until you defeat it . . . The detail here is in the storyline, not the graphics . . . A fantastic RPG that only gets better as you play it." —Joshua Hoffman (formerly at allgame.com)

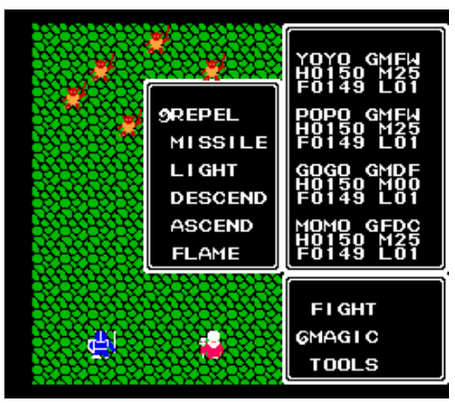
Notable Quotable:

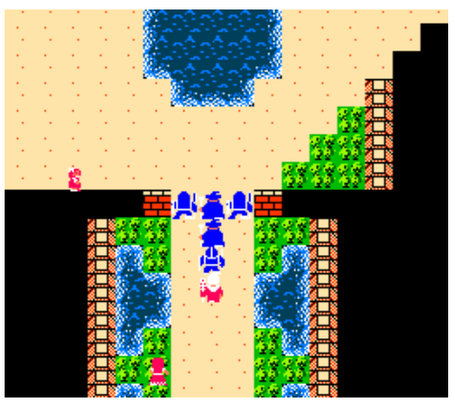
"A very large game . . . very complex . . . requires a great deal of resource management, puzzle solving, and the willingness to endure many, many battles with groups of monsters you will encounter repeatedly through the game . . . Although *Ultima* offers quite a bit of graphic animation, there is very little true action in the game . . . a great intellectual challenge." —*Computer Entertainer* (August 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"The programmers have simplified the play mechanics and interaction while preserving the integrity and complexity that made *Ultima* a gaming sensation . . . One of the few adventure/strategy games that push the Nintendo Entertainment System to the edge! The graphics and sounds may be limited





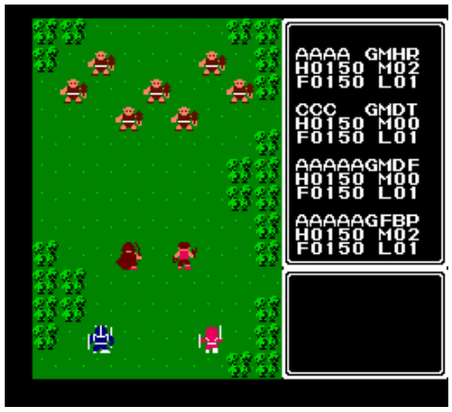


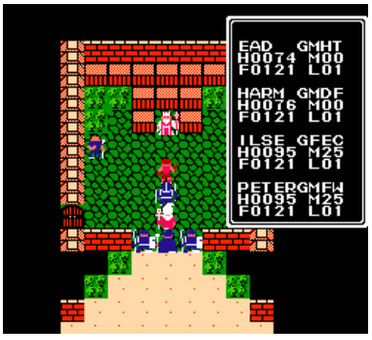
© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

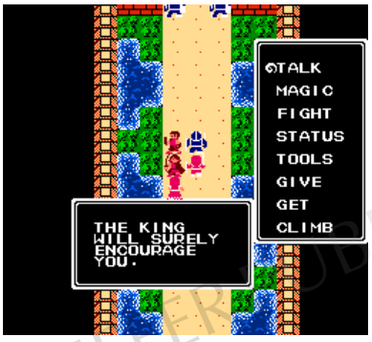
(most of the principal characters are not very detailed), but the wealth of play options and elaborate obstacles more than make up for these minor shortcomings." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"Don't pick characters without magic—they just plain suck. Magic regenerates by walking, and it regenerates pretty quickly. There is no reason to take a thief, fighter, or barbarian (or an alchemist or illusionist). Thieves can open chests, but so can anyone with cleric spells . . . All of the player characters look great, including 64×64 pixel full-body portraits, which add a nice touch. Monsters look monstrous and eventually grow in size. The backgrounds would be nice, but the line-of-sight system really breaks down what would otherwise be artistically framed screenshots . . . *Ultima: Exodus* has been surpassed by its predecessors (specifically *Final Fantasy III* and *Dragon Warrior III*), but it's highly addictive . . . when NPCs move they instantly teleport from tile to tile. This was a carry-over from the 1983 version, but it would have been nice to update the movements for the NES release. Also the NES can only support five sprites on a column at a time . . . an interesting little world to explore. I've lost myself inside its 8-bit code for hours at a time." —8-Bit City (8bitcity.blogspot.com)







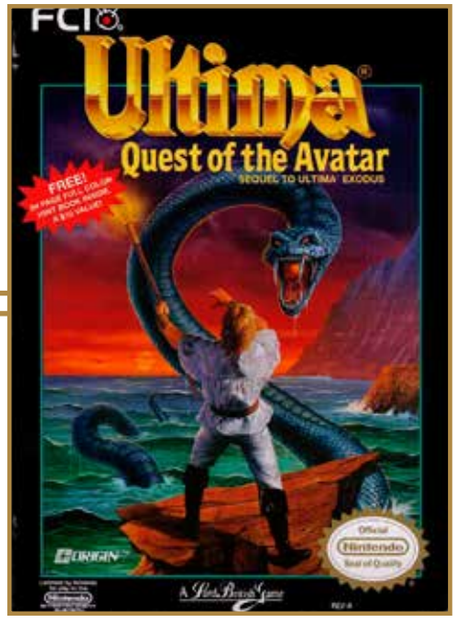
Insider Insight: *Ultima: Exodus* was my introduction to the RPG genre. My cousin Kelly got the game one Christmas before I even had an NES of my own. He brought his system over to my house and we set it up in the basement and spent the next few days trying to figure the game out. I didn't spend much time looking in the manual to try to understand what was going on; I just watched him play the game. The first time he went to the overworld after being sent on his quest by Lord British it felt like a huge world loomed in front of us. "Where do we go?" and "What do we do?" seemed to be all we could think about, but ahead he went.

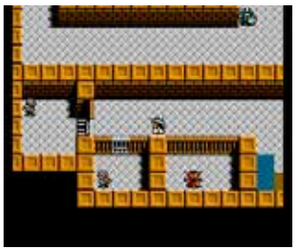
Seeing the enemies that we could encounter on the overworld map and then going into the battle screen itself was so new and interesting to us. Little did we know that we were witnessing what would become the standard for the JRPG turn-based genre. Even though the battle system was quite different from what we would later see in *Dragon Warrior* and *Final Fantasy*, you can definitely see the groundwork that was being laid. I imagine that for most people the music in this game isn't much to write home about, but to this day one of us can start humming the battle music or dungeon music and the other will start singing along with him. It would take us quite a while to get to the end of the game to witness the infamous (to us) "Floors Appears" battle, but this was the first of many RPGs that Kelly and I would play together. — John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming-4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces* podcast

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ultima: Quest of the Avatar

PUBLISHER: FCI.
DEVELOPER: Infinity.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.





The second *Ultima* game for the NES, *Ultima: Quest of the Avatar* is a port of the popular computer title, *Ultima IV: Quest of the Avatar* (1985). The game is a departure from previous RPGs in that players are on a quest to become the Avatar, a shining example of heroism for the people of Britannia. There are still doors to unlock, text-based commands to select, dungeons (of the pseudo-3-D variety) to explore, treasure chests to find, magic spells to cast, weapons to brandish (including a sling, a staff, a club, an axe, and a sword), and monsters to kill (via turn-based battles), but players must now be careful to master eight virtues: valor, compassion, honesty, honor, sacrifice, justice, humility, and spirituality. Fleeing from a battle lowers valor, lying decreases honesty, giving blood increases sacrifice, and so on. The game offers eight playable character types: mage, bard, fighter, druid, tinker, paladin, ranger, and shepherd, each rated according to such attributes as strength, dexterity, experience, hit points, and intelligence. The action takes place on a traditional tile-based, overhead world map. In dungeon sections the view switches to first person, but it is also laid out in a grid pattern. Monster/enemy battles occur on a smaller tactical map.

Notable Quotable:

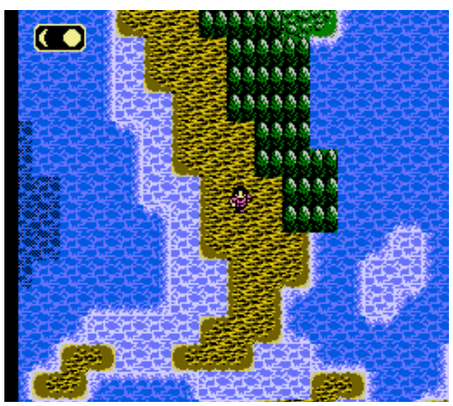
"*Avatar* is a worthy sequel to *Exodus*, and *Ultima* fans should enjoy it the most. Another massive quest with tons of items to find and mysteries to solve. Not only is the quest bigger, but the graphics and sounds have improved greatly . . . If you really get into these types of quest adventures where you barely move very far before being confronted by weird creatures then you'll love this." — *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Continues the high quality set by its predecessor. It's a massive game, rich in role playing detail, that will challenge your intellect, intuition, and stamina . . . The size of the world is impressive. You'll have to do lots of exploring and fight many battles in the course of your quest . . . offers a supreme challenge . . . an enormous game that will keep most players busy for a month or more." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

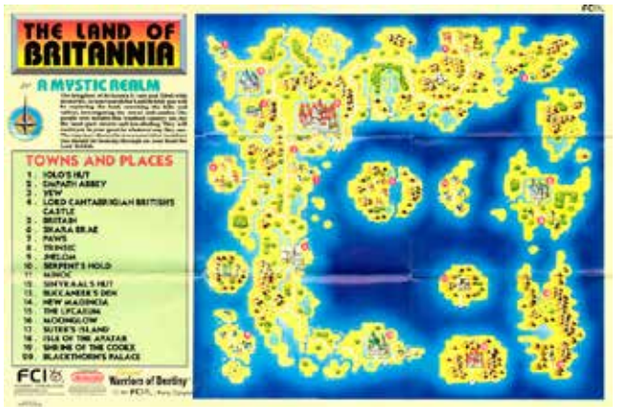
"Overworld battling is pretty dull . . . sort of like *Final Fantasy Tactics* if you and enemies could only move one square per turn. Many of these fights start with your guys on the bottom of the screen and the enemies on the top, causing a good amount of time being eaten up by everyone s-l-o-w-l-y moving towards each other before any actual fighting takes place . . . Thankfully that problem is alleviated as you get farther into the game. As you gain more and more money you'll be able to equip many of your party members with various projectile weapons (some quite powerful), allowing them to cut down foes from a distance. And when you start exploring dungeons you'll find that most of the fighting is done in fairly confined rooms, where it'll only take a few short moments to get into position to start hacking away at monster limbs . . . the rewards are high if you can endure the early going. While it can become painfully boring to get your party assembled and master the virtues, once the dungeon crawling begins this game picks up and becomes fun and memorable, as you stop piddling around with beggars and blood donations and start scrambling through mazes battling powerful monsters for great rewards." —Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ultima: Warriors of Destiny

PUBLISHER: FCI.
DEVELOPER: Origin Systems.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.



The third and final *Ultima* game for the NES, *Ultima: Warriors of Destiny* is a port of the popular computer game, *Ultima V: Warriors of Destiny* (1988). Unfortunately it's the most disappointing of the three, thanks to sluggish controls, repetitious music, and crummy graphics (including prohibitively dark nighttime scenes). The player, as the hero of Britannia (a.k.a. the Avatar), must rescue Lord British (who has disappeared in the Underworld) and defeat the once-trusted Lord Blackthorn, who has risen to power and rules as a fascist dictator. This involves interacting with hundreds of characters; engaging in real time battles (you must select a bow, magic axe, sling, sword, or other weapon); riding a horse and a magic carpet; searching dungeons for treasure; boosting karma, compassion, and other virtues (by doing good deeds); and much more. The game is harder to find than the other NES titles in the series.

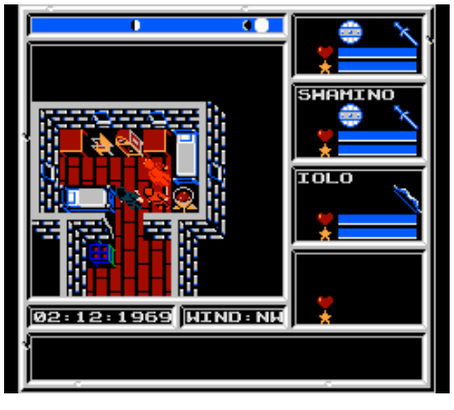
Notable Quotable:

"The *Ultima* ports on the NES are defined by their varying quality. *Exodus* had its faults (some might say 'quirks'), but it was playable. *Quest of the Avatar* lacked some of the depth of the PC version but it was a good game, if you could get used to wandering around for hours on end. *Warriors of Destiny* doesn't even shoot for quality. It's a broken, useless port that does great disservice to the storied *Ultima* series." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

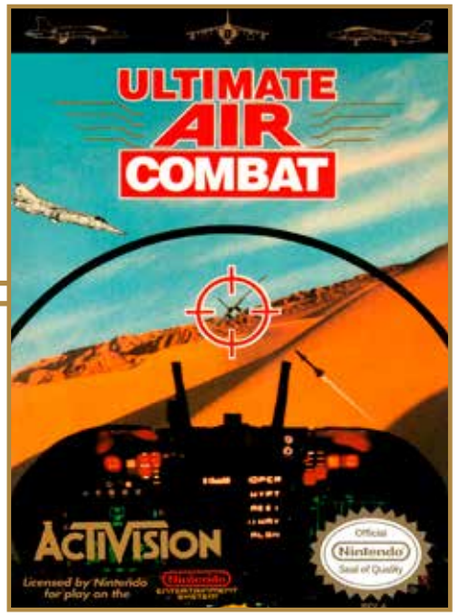
"The NES *Warriors of Destiny* is legendarily bad . . . The majority of the game's impressive writing has been cut severely for space; in previous games this wasn't so bad, but the script is probably the game's primary appeal, and without it the entire experience falls flat. The NES struggles to run this program, with walking speed agonizingly slow and an aggravating delay between every button press and the command actually being executed. The low resolution of the NES results in the *Ultima VI*–style graphics being grainy, muddled, and far, far too dark. Not only is it impossible to tell what you're looking at half the time, Britannia's overall size and complexity has been drastically reduced, and there isn't much worth looking at in the first place. Other cuts and reductions to the game are legion, including the lack of an ability to name your character, a truncated introduction, lack of sound effects, apparently only one (grating) music track in the whole game, and a total absence of horses in the entirety of the realm, save for everyone's favorite NPC Smith." —Robert Kosarko (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

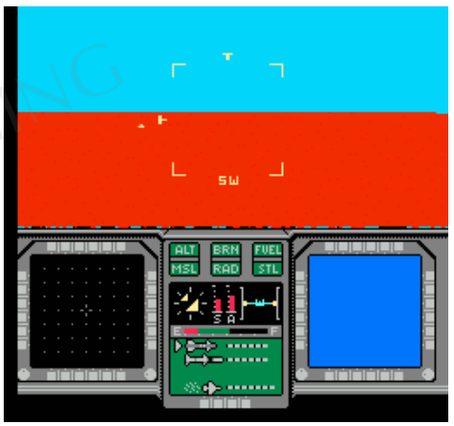
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Ultimate Air Combat

PUBLISHER: Activision.
DEVELOPER: Activision.
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator/Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.





As the Navy's greatest test pilot you are charged with an important objective: to stop General Luigi Don Gwano from taking command of all neighboring oil fields. Depending on the plane selected you view the action from inside the cockpit of an AV-8 Harrier, an F14 Tomcat, or an F18 Hornet. Each craft is armed with a variety of lasers, missiles, cannons, and bombs. Missions, which are introduced via briefings, are divided into two sections: the aforementioned cockpit view (complete with half-screen instrument panel), where you blow away airborne enemies; and an unusual (for this type of game) overhead view (reminiscent of EA's *Desert Strike* series), where you bomb surface targets in addition to shooting enemy planes. By grabbing bonus balloons, which appear when you destroy planes and ground objects, you can acquire extra fuel, missiles, and bombs, as well as repair damaged sections of your plane. *Ultimate Air Combat* is known as *Aces: Iron Eagle III* in Japan, despite having little to nothing to do with the film of the same name.

Notable Quotable:
"This intense and fun combat cart will push your video flying skills to the max. *Ultimate Air Combat*? They aren't kidding." —*GamePro* (January 1992)

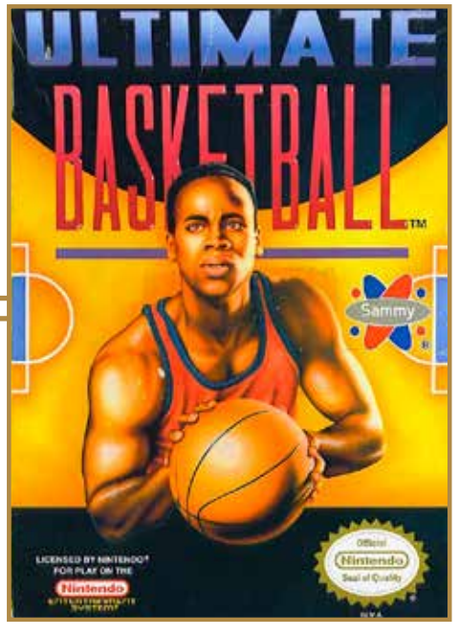
Notable Quotable:
"An average entry to the flight simulation genre . . . the NES simply did not have the capability to carry out the look and feel the designer obviously intended for this often-choppy title." —*Video Game Bible, 1985–2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:
"I've never been one for flight sims on a home console, but *Ultimate Air Combat* makes the strongest case for the genre's presence on the NES. Thirty-seven missions, with names like 'Hit or Missile' and 'Fort Scragg'! . . . Three cheers for replay value and variety, but the biggest service *UAC* provides the player is smooth controls. The planes maneuver like butter, even when you're upside down and careening towards the ocean. The only smudge on the controls' otherwise impeccable record involves launching missiles with B during the first person air combat portions. Even when I was locked on to a bogey I had to be at just the right angle for my missile to launch; otherwise nothing would happen when I pressed B. It's a nuisance that can be worked around (my machine gun shot down planes just fine). Thankfully it only occurs during air combat, which is always the first part of every mission . . . Best flight sim on the NES? Probably." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ultimate Basketball

PUBLISHER: American Sammy.
DEVELOPER: Aicom.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

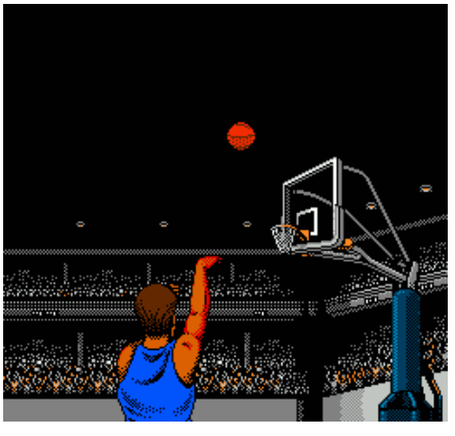


Like many 8-bit hoops titles, *Ultimate Basketball* is viewed from the side and scrolls a little to show the entire court. Features include dunk animations, a halftime show with cheerleaders, fouls, backcourt violations, player substitutions, and a limited Tournament mode in which players must beat two of the game's seven fictional teams. Each team has players with varying attributes and skill levels in terms of height, weight, speed, shooting, and defense. The five-on-five action, offering one-player, two-player (cooperative), and versus roundball is playable, especially with a friend, but the game suffers from spotty inbound passing, cheap foul calls, and uneven stealing—the computer is invariably a much better ball thief than the player. Amusingly (unintentionally so), the computer players sometimes hold onto the ball after trying to dunk, resulting in a traveling call. On a more positive note the in-game music is topnotch, the kind any 8-bit rock band should consider adding to their set list. The graphics are sharp as well, featuring detailed players (including the bench guys), nice animation, and a good sense of court depth. To sum up: the game has good production values but falls short in terms of gameplay.

Memories: *Ultimate Basketball* tries (but fails) to emulate *Double Dribble*, the best basketball game on the NES and one I spent hours and hours playing during the late '80s and into the early '90s. These days, when it comes to hoops, I mostly play *NBA Jam* and *NBA Street*, both of which offer exceptional arcade style action. Better yet, when the weather's nice I like to ride my bike to the local park and play real basketball.

Notable Quotable:
"Lots of action moving back and forth on the court, with just the right amount of technique thrown in for some good strategy . . . I especially like the substitutions and the stamina meter . . . plays fast . . . definitely one of the better basketball games for the NES . . . Nice graphics and cool close-ups when slam dunking enhance this extremely well-playing basketball game." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1990)

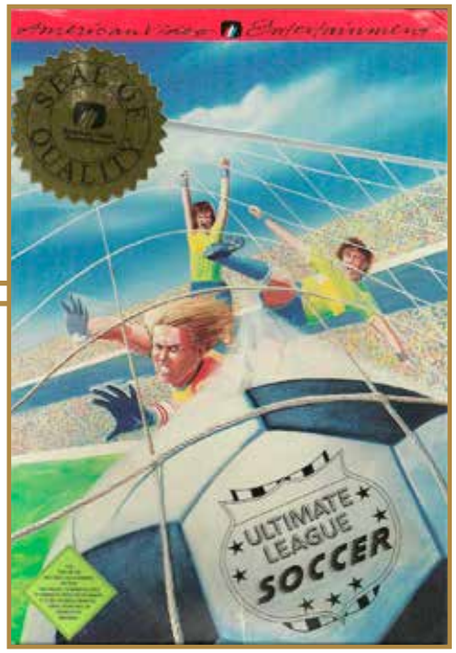
Notable Quotable:
"I got called for a lot of fouls on both ends, as apparently breathing on an opposing player will cause a foul . . . jump balls don't just occur at the beginning of the game, but rather at the beginning of each quarter . . . 75-foot shots are remarkably easy to make, but that goes for the CPU as well. Even on the easiest level the CPU defense is sharp to the point of being unrealistic . . . Frustrating." —The Cannon Review (thecanonreview.blogspot.com)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Ultimate League Soccer

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Computer & Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



One of the more obscure NES sports titles, *Ultimate League Soccer* lets players select from eight different international teams—France, UK, US, Argentina, Italy, Brazil, Australia, and Germany—each of which is ranked according to offense, defense, speed, skill, accuracy, and experience. The game, which scrolls in all directions to let you follow action, offers an overhead view and single game and tournament modes. Gamers on offense pass or shoot the ball. On defense, you can switch players to get close to the ball and try to steal by slide tackling. When there's a shot on goal, play control automatically switches to the goalie to try to protect the net. A radar at the bottom of the screen shows the positioning of all the players on the field. Gamers can select from four different uniform colors (white, green, gray, and red) and three different game lengths and player formations. Penalty kick contests determine the winner of games that end in a tie. Includes a halftime show with cheerleaders. Amusingly (or so the creators thought), the cartridge label says the game is part of the "Kick-Ass Sports Series," with a foot kicking a donkey (a.k.a. ass). Unlicensed and very hard to find.

Notable Quotable:

"USA's offense and defense might be terrible, but boy can they run a soccer ball! Germany's too powerful . . . It's easy to switch between players while passing the ball, but be forewarned, the ball animation is janky and slow compared to the players' movement. It's jarring at first, but easy to grow accustomed to. Options are limited . . . Not as entertaining as *Nintendo World Cup* . . . better than the worthless *Goal!* games. *Ultimate League Soccer* reigns supreme in the 'mediocre' section of the NES soccer pantheon." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

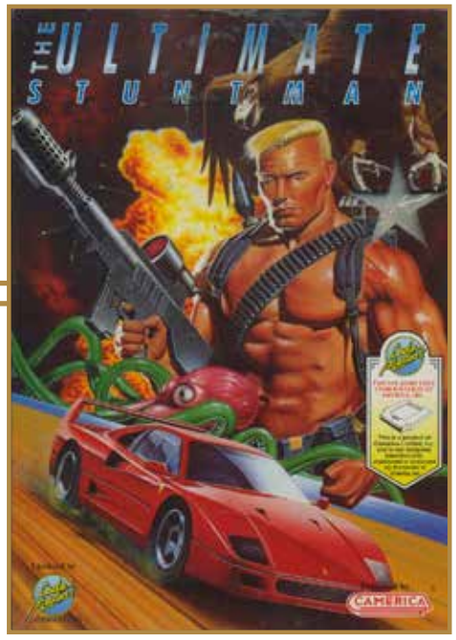
Notable Quotable:

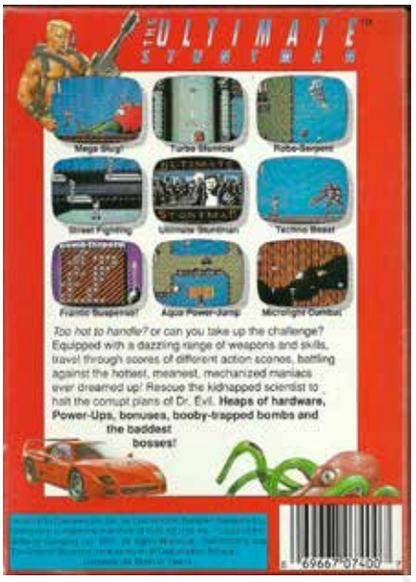
"The controls are simple enough. Shoot and pass on offense. Slide tackle on defense. You have to be disappointed in the lack of creativity here . . . You won't see any special shots or unconscious players . . . Realism seems to be the aim in *Ultimate League Soccer*, though that's a fairly unattainable goal for a system with NES specs . . . The AI is halfway decent, and you'll need to connect the right passes when you want to score. Eventually you will be able to find a pattern that will generate goals at will and the game loses its excitement . . . as visually pleasing as an NES game is ever going to be. The audio serves its purpose." —GameFaqs (gamefaqs.gamespot.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Ultimate Stuntman

PUBLISHER: Camerica.
DEVELOPER: Codemasters.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.





Play several completely different genres in *The Ultimate Stuntman*. In pursuit of Dr. Evil you, as an Arnold Schwarzenegger–type character, race along freeways and back roads, through rivers and rapids, and across dune-covered beaches as you shoot enemies and dodge such obstacles as missiles, rockfalls, bullets, and bombs. The vertical-scrolling action is viewed from overhead, and you can cruise at turbo speeds and find weapons along the route. You'll also take to the side-scrolling streets, collecting keys, jumping on platforms, and shooting robots. *Crazy Climber*–like action is on the docket as well. As a human fly you'll scale a building with the added thrill of guiding a crosshair around the screen, shooting such diverse things as bombs, giant spiders, and falling television sets. You must also defuse a bomb in a puzzle-like scenario, desoldering the bomb's microchips in a certain order. In addition, there's side-scrolling shooter action as you take flight in a microlight plane, dodging rocks and cliffs, shooting helicopters, and bombing surface vehicles and rockets. You'll pilot the microlight plane in vertical-scrolling shooting sequences as well, shooting and avoiding such enemies as dirigibles and guys flying via jet pack. A shadow beneath your plane helps you gauge your altitude in the vertical stages.

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"I've got mixed feelings about this action packed shoot-'em-up. On the debit side, the title falls short in the playability department. Our hero, at times, appears to have a mind of his own . . . A distinct lack of originality . . . leaves you feeling you've seen it all before. Graphics and sonics are varied, although basic at times. On the other hand, I thoroughly enjoyed the six different scenarios . . . loaded to the brim with power-ups and items to collect. On balance only an average title." —*N-Force* (August 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Above average in graphical and audio quality. While each of these modes most likely wouldn't stand on their own as a title due to the repetitious nature of their gameplay, together as a whole they give *Ultimate Stuntman* not only longevity in their variety, but are darn entertaining as well . . . the beach is fairly bland and barren, but the streets and waterways look very good, while all of the vehicles are large, well-animated, and have little details, such as their respective dust/water/sand coming from them while racing, to sparks flying off them during collisions. Each environment makes good use of bright colors . . . the screen scrolls smoothly . . . While some of the included modes are seriously lacking in depth, as an entire product *Ultimate Stuntman* works, and works quite well." —Geoffrey Douglas Smith (formerly at allgame.com)

The Uncanny X-Men

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Unknown (possibly Bothtec or Pixel).
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Action, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.

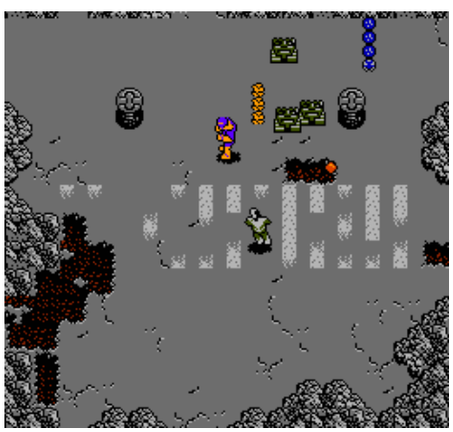
Called "Marvel's X-Men" on the title screen, *The Uncanny X-Men* marked the first appearance of the mutant super group on a video game console. Unfortunately, thanks to lousy gameplay and hideous graphics, it is a disgrace to the popular comic book franchise. Players guide a small, pitifully rendered version of Wolverine, Cyclops, Storm, Colossus, Nightcrawler, or Iceman up the screen, using his or her mutant powers to battle Juggernaut, The White Queen, Boomerang, Sabretooth, and Magneto, along with scores of lesser villains. The computer or a second player guides a tagalong X-Man, and solo gamers can toggle control of the two characters selected. Certain team-ups work better for certain areas, and you can't lag too far behind because the screen won't scroll up if one character is at the bottom. Each character can jump or fly; some hurl projectiles, while others can only fight at close range, and each is individually rated in power, endurance, speed, and willpower. Four missions, each of which contains two keys to find, are included: Future City Street Fight (ruins of a once-beautiful city); Search and Destroy the Robofactory; Subterranean Confrontation (a dark and marshy cave); and Battle through a Living Starship. There's also Practice mode, where you can train with each of the X-Men in their fabled Danger Room.

Notable Quotable:

"A strange, laughably bad mess of a game . . . the CPU aimlessly moves your teammate in a seemingly random manner until he/she quickly gets killed . . . Game time is spent slogging your way through amazingly ugly levels while attempting to punch or shoot a selection of unidentifiable enemies. 'Attempting' is the keyword here, as it's nearly impossible to punch an enemy without getting hit yourself, and shooting is rarely more successful . . . the tiny characters that are supposed to represent the X-Men bear little resemblance to their comic book counterparts. A failure on every level . . . one of the worst games ever produced." —Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"I always wondered why companies even bothered to get a license for comic books and movies when they're just going to make a crappy game that has nothing to do with them anyway. In this piece of trash you control a group of children in cardboard robot costumes. The game claims they're the X-Men, but since none of them seem to exhibit any of the X-Men's powers, you can't be sure . . . Two X-Men at a time waddle through armies of small mechanical things that look like they were made out of trash cans and Speak & Spells. The computer controls one of them, but you can count on them either getting stuck in a corner or repeatedly running into the same enemy until they die. Needless to say they're about as much help as Gilligan." —Seanbaby (www.cracked.com), who ranked *The Uncanny X-Men* the third-worst NES game

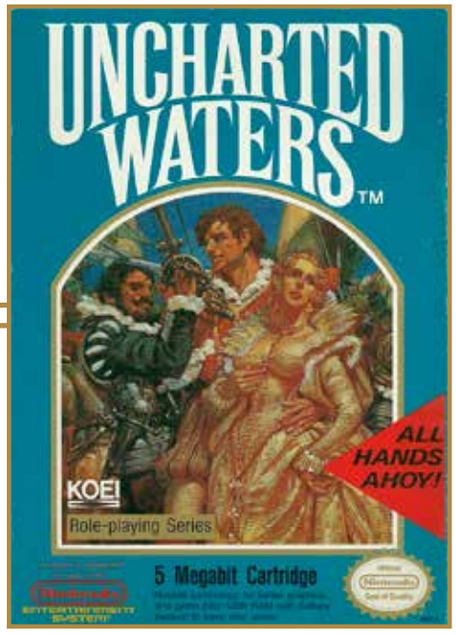


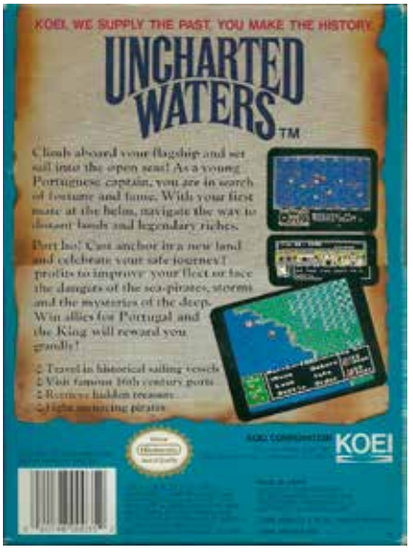
Insider Insight: The X-Men were hugely popular in the '80s and '90s, and I, like many kids, was a huge fan. I bought the game from Kmart with my parents and was really looking forward to playing as the cast of mutants, but I was in for a rude awakening. All of the characters were just one of two types: ones that could punch and ones that could shoot. The punching characters were worthless so I stuck to going through the game as a shooter. It forced you to choose a CPU-controlled character and I always chose a puncher, since the CPU was about as intelligent as the story for *X-Men 3: The Last Stand*. I could make my way through the four stages and beat them all, as well as escape them within the time limit after I beat the stage boss, but I had thought that was the end of the game. I was wrong. Go look at the game label—I'll wait. You see that small line of text that says "+up +b together with Start?" That was supposed to be the code to access the last level after you beat the other four but they misprinted the code. The actual code is to hold select, up, and b, then press start. Also you must have the Practice stage highlighted, as well as picked up all the items in the other four levels. Decades later this game still finds ways to frustrate me. —Chris Leathco, blogger at Retro Gaming Roundup, author of *Afterglow* and *The Virtual Boy Game Library*

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Uncharted Waters

PUBLISHER: Koei.
DEVELOPER: Koei.
GAME TYPE: Role-Playing Game/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.





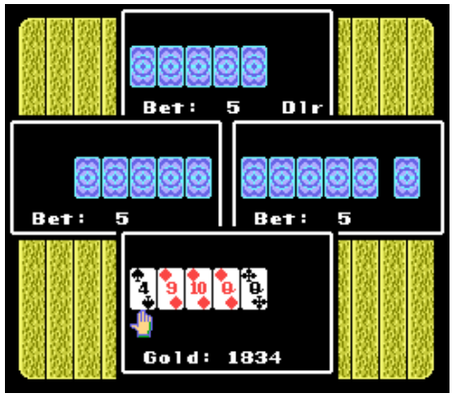
A typically complicated offering from Koei, *Uncharted Waters* puts the gamer in the role of a Portuguese captain, bartering for precious treasures as a merchant or plundering and pillaging as a ruthless pirate. You'll perform a variety of functions, including walking through the streets of Lisbon; recruiting sailors; sailing the open seas; discovering hidden ports (along the coastline) and new trade routes; rescuing people in distress; fighting Spanish and Turkish fleets (in turn-based battles); gaining allies for Portugal; purchasing and repairing ships; stocking ships with supplies; playing cards; visiting inns for food and gossip; and dealing with typhoons and strong currents. There is indeed a lot to do in the game, and much of the action is viewed from overhead. Success as you go increases your sailing experience, sailing level, leadership, strength, wisdom, courage, and intelligence. The game, which is hard to find, is set in 1502, which is when Christopher Columbus set out on his fourth and final voyage to the New World.

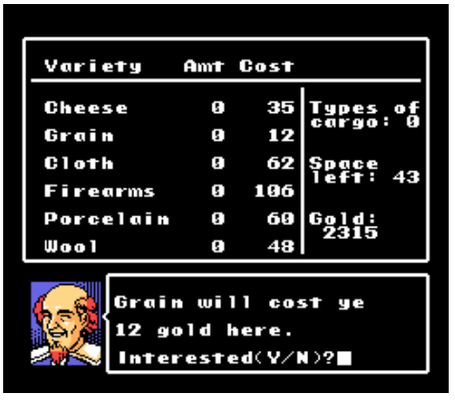
Notable Quotable:

"Someone's just discovered that the Earth could be round, but the Old World's graphics and sounds are looking rather flat here. The visuals are basically limited to glorified dialogue screens. At least the loopy tunes are the only thing that could make you seasick. The game's intensive button pressing and icon based, menu-driven interface will send some virgin Koei captains into the doldrums. An active imagination and a knack for numbers are the keys to enjoying this game, as much of the gameplay involves money managing activities . . . It's not too exciting to watch, but you get some satisfaction from sending enemy fleets to Davy Jones' locker." —*GamePro* (December 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"*Uncharted Waters* combined the massive scale and complexity of the company's cult favorite strategy simulations—think *Nobunaga's Ambition*—with the granular involvement of a *Dragon Quest* style role playing game. Although *Uncharted Waters* never rose above the level of 'minor hit,' its fans still admire the way in which it combined two similar but ultimately quite different genres with such confidence and style. Being a Koei game, of course, it's rooted in real world history—in this case the Age of Discovery, featuring quite a few names from the history books. The multimodal play format of this innovative adventure prefigured the seamless simulations to come." —Polygon (www.polygon.com), which ranked *Uncharted Waters* the 35th-greatest NES game





SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Uninvited

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Kemco.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Graphic Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

Fans of such NES titles as *Shadowgate* and *Déjà Vu* should enjoy *Uninvited*, which was originally released in 1986 as a Macintosh computer game. As the unnamed protagonist you find yourself awakened beside your car that you crashed near a creepy old mansion. You quickly exit the vehicle and wonder if your sister survived the wreck and has gone into that haunted house. Thus, the search is on. While exploring the rickety residence you'll enter a variety of commands—exam, open (doors and containers), use, leave, take, close, hit, speak, and move—to interact with characters, solve puzzles, search for clues, use magic spells, manipulate objects (including weapons), and more. Lots of trial and error here and some bafflingly tricky, unintuitive puzzles.

Notable Quotable:

"Tries to simulate real life with graphics instead of text or putting the characters in action oriented gameplay. The problem is that, while the quest is OK, the graphics and interaction just don't cut it. Too complex for its own good." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"It's not a bad port to the NES, and the graphics and interface are actually pretty good. However, it has some serious gameplay flaws, and often is just difficult and complicated for the sake of drawing the game out . . . If you like text adventures then you might get some enjoyment out of this, especially if you really like odd challenges, though the bottom line is that it's just average compared to other adventure games." —Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

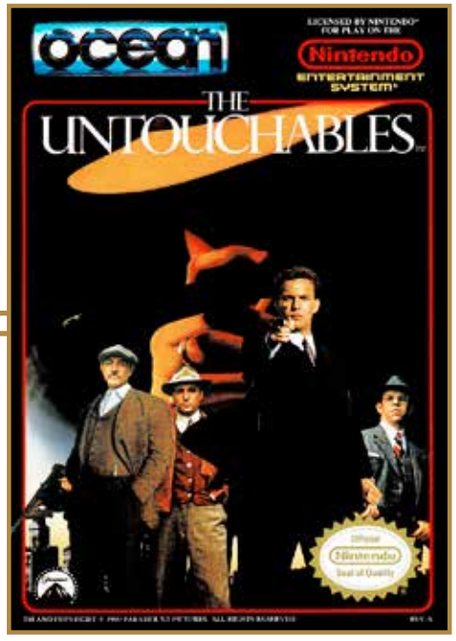
"It's a bit cumbersome with a game pad, but I don't hold its format against it . . . The bigger problem is simply that it doesn't do what it could have done all that effectively. Instead of a rich and enticing text adventure with pictures it's a watered down graphic adventure with print . . . there are no voices or notable sound effects, and the less said about its staggeringly repetitive, MIDI-style music the better. The game certainly has its tense and spooky moments, to be sure, and the depth of interaction may well please those who rue the one-click-fits-all mentality of today's adventures. At a modest length of four-plus hours (apart from any major stumbling blocks) some might find it worth a look as an old school 'haunted house' precursor to the likes of *Dark Fall* and *Scratches*. Short of its nostalgic value, however, for anyone else there's little here to warrant dredging up the horrors of *Uninvited* anymore." —Jack Allin (adventuregamers.com)

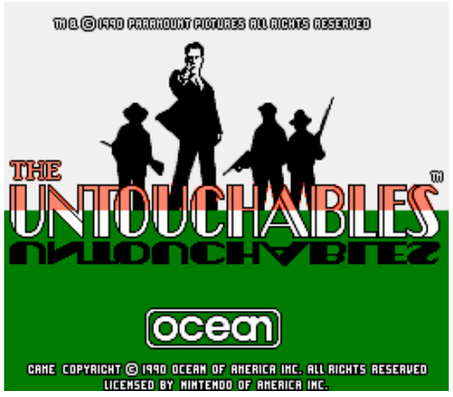
Insider Insight: As a child, the thrill of fear as well as the feeling that you are watching something taboo can elicit powerful emotions. That's why when I came across the box for *Uninvited* in my local rental store, with the skeleton wearing a dress leaping out in front, I knew I had to give it a try. I was excited loading the cartridge up for the first time—so excited that I could not help but explore the opening scene in all its detail. Said opening scene is a wrecked car, so my character was engulfed in the fireball of the car exploding shortly after. I spent over a year exploring outside of that car into the mansion and the grounds it sat on and months trying to figure out why I kept dying after a certain number of turns (hint: don't pick up the ruby!). Most of the haunts weren't really that scary, with the horror actually coming from the variety of ways your character met their end in gross detail. *Uninvited* was a way for me to explore the unknown, not just for my character to survive, but also to delve deeper and unravel the mysteries the game held. —Chris Leathco, blogger at Retro Gaming Roundup, author of *Afterglow* and *The Virtual Boy Game Library*

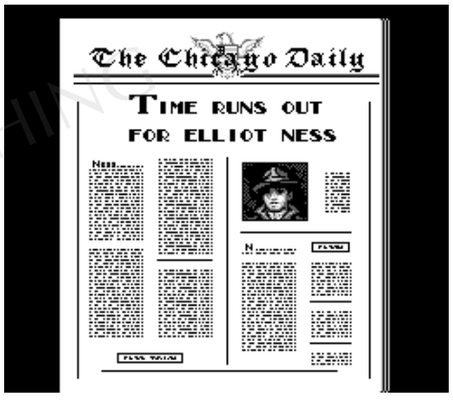
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Untouchables

PUBLISHER: Ocean Software.
DEVELOPER: Special FX Software.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Shooter/Platform Shooter/ First-Person Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.







The Untouchables takes place in Prohibition-era Chicago, with players controlling Eliot Ness and his elite squad of crime busters: Malone, Stone, and Wallace. There are seven levels of play, the first of which (Streets) finds Ness, viewed from behind, popping out from behind a wall, taking shots at gangsters appearing in alleyway windows. Unfortunately the gun site is slow and Ness must reload after every two shots, causing sheer frustration. Subsequent levels of play include Warehouse (jump on crates, shoot bad guys, grab evidence), Bridge (lie on ground for cover, use rapid fire to kill gangsters), Alley (similar to Streets), Train Station (guide baby carriage down stairs while avoiding enemy fire and obstacles), Hostage (take out Al Capone's henchman using only one shot), and Rooftops (similar to Streets). Loosely based on Brian De Palma's 1987 feature film, which in turn was based on the 1959 TV series.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics actually look very good . . . aiming crosshairs are stiff and sluggish . . . one of the stupidest looking jumps I've ever seen in a video game . . . sometimes you can't jump on all the boxes. It looks like you can jump on all of them, but no, you just fall right through . . . Level four is a dull rehash of the first level . . . has a somewhat decent ending . . . Maybe Ocean should have called it 'The Unplayable.'" —filmnstuff (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"Surprisingly, for a dreaded 'licensed game' it fares a tick above average. Several scenes from the movie are recreated with varying degrees of success . . . Some liberties were taken to make a playable game out of a given scene, such as chasing guys around a warehouse or seemingly *endless* stairs with a baby carriage. I don't remember the train station being THAT big . . . the graphics here aren't really bad . . . The game has an odd mechanic where you finish a stage, then go back to the title screen. The first time this happened I thought my game was screwed up. There's an unlimited amount of continues and you'll use 'em all. I REALLY wish this game allowed the use of a Zapper along the lines of *Bayou Billy*. The crosshairs in some stages are controlled by the d-pad and they are stupid hard. Rolling around on the ground like you're on fire gets a little tiresome, too. The music is decent and varied, so at least you won't listen to crap while you die all the time." — Paul Potvin (www.1morecastle.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Urban Champion

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1986.

Originally released in the arcades by Nintendo in 1985 as *Vs. Urban Champion*, this game puts you in the role of a blue- or green-haired street brawler. Each character is capable of unleashing two fighting moves: a fast, soft punch and a slow, hard punch. They can block punches thrown to their body and face as well. The objective is to pummel the opposing fighter until his stamina reaches zero or he's backed into a manhole. Citizens drop flower pots out of windows, so of course you should dodge them. If a fight lasts too long a patrol car will come along and take away whomever is losing the round, which is the fighter who has been pushed back farthest toward the edge of the playfield. Background graphics largely consist of generic looking buildings, such as a bookstore, a snack bar, a barber shop, and a discount shop. Further in the background are skyscrapers with lighted windows. An early NES title, *Urban Champion* was popular upon release, but it hasn't aged well.

Notable Quotable:

"This game isn't nearly as cathartic as *Kung Fu* . . . There simply aren't enough options. Because of that it also won't take you too long to master. If flower pots fell more quickly than one or two per block the game would have been much more exciting." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games* (St. Martin's Press, 1988)

Notable Quotable:

"Although fighting games are very popular at the moment, this one has little to recommend it . . . lacks the depth of play we've come to expect from Nintendo . . . although somewhat better as a two-player game than as a solo contest against the computer, neither version is likely to keep gamers coming back for repeated sessions . . . a disappointingly dull slugfest." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1986)

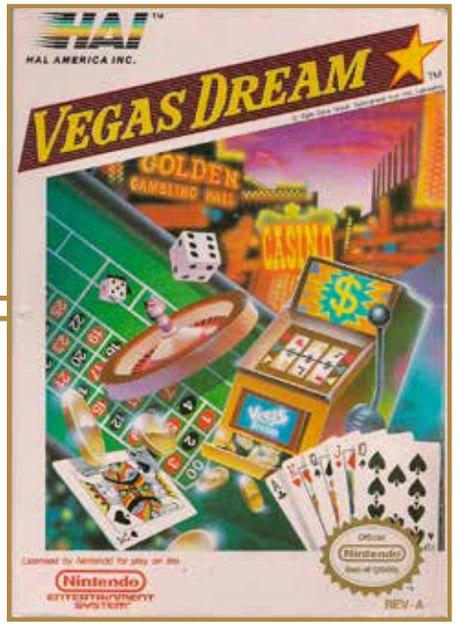
Insider Insight: Nintendo's iconic Black Box titles—so pixelated, so simple, so black. These were the games that drew me in when I first became aware of Nintendo in 1986, and they still made up a large percentage of the games available for the system throughout much of 1987. Since these were Nintendo's games (as opposed to third party) they were the ones highlighted on the back of their console box, and on the poster that came with the system. For a period of time these titles were the only games that I knew existed for the NES and they carry a special place in my childhood memory, as I obsessed over them while yearning for an NES console. I would stare at the game boxes at the local Walmart and imagine what the game would play like simply based on the description and the few screen shots provided on the back. I loved how the cover art attempted to actually reflect the look of the game inside instead of embellishing through overly elaborate art.

Despite this appeal, I never actually played *Urban Champion* during the '80s. I didn't know anyone who had a copy, and while I was intrigued by it, by the time I received my NES for Christmas in 1987 there were way cooler games to obsess over. Once NES games started to become dirt cheap in the late '90s at second hand stores such as FuncoLand, *Urban Champion* was one of the first I picked up for a dollar or two in an effort to spark my nostalgia for the Black Box games and my pre-teen years. While I do have fun with the game on occasion, I'm thankful I didn't drop $45 of 1987 money on it. The gameplay is shallow, and because it's not very difficult I tend to get bored with it before my game ends. That was basically the M.O. for most early Black Box games, though. Repetitive gameplay reminiscent of golden age arcade games but without the difficulty or the atmosphere. — Jason Breininger, writer for VHSRevival.com, CartridgeCorner.blog, and PressRewind.net

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Vegas Dream

PUBLISHER: HAL America.
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory.
GAME TYPE: Gambling, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



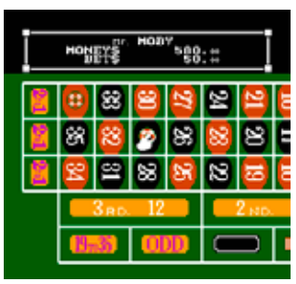
In *Vegas Dream* you and up to three friends head for Las Vegas in hopes of winning up to $1,000,000. You begin with $700.00 as you challenge your friends or the house to the following games: Blackjack (which includes the ability to buy insurance, double down, and split pairs); Roulette; Slot Machines (Jackpot Bar and Pot'o Gold); and Keno. Standard rules apply for each game. Unfortunately poker is not included. When playing the game in Vegas Dream mode you will encounter a variety of strangers (who appear via window and dialogue), both good and bad. The people who approach you will be looking for side bets, trying to hustle you, looking for romance, or trying to win your pity with their hard-luck stories. You can accept or reject their proposal, resulting in a positive or negative outcome. For example, you might get pickpocketed by a date, or you could loan someone money who pays you back with interest. This does spice up the game somewhat and adds variety. The One Spot mode of play features the same four games as the adventurous Vegas Dream mode but without the storyline and strangers.

Notable Quotable:

"This is one of several gambling games for the NES, and while average at best, it's certainly better than the Sachen releases." —*Video Game Bible: 1985–2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:

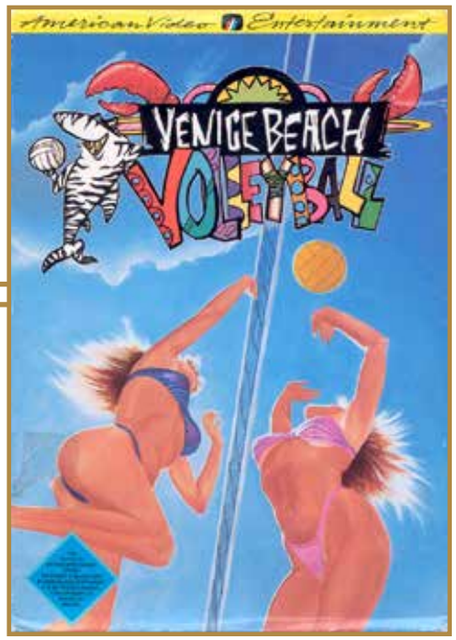
"Despite [Blackjack] being the only skill based game available, it still feels like it's unfairly rigged for the dealer to win. Nearly every hand the dealer ends up with an exposed face card, or they end up perfectly at 21. Of course when you control the deck it's not surprising they can get all the best cards . . . Ignoring the fact that virtual slot machines are inherently rather boring, the biggest problem I have with playing the slot machines is the fact that you can't win anything with diagonal lines . . . relatively happy with the graphics . . . The audio is ok, but it can get a bit repetitive and annoying after a while . . . some of the music is a little bit too high pitched at times . . . Everything in the game plays well, but I can't really ignore the fact that there isn't much substance to the game." —Deadpark (www.deadpark.com)



OSCILLATOR PUBLISHING

Venice Beach Volleyball

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Idea-Tek.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Volleyball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



Volleyball's premier two-person teams have gathered in Venice, California, for the Venice Beach Open, but only four teams remain. The game lets players select from these four teams (two men's teams, two women's teams), each of which is rated according to speed, smash (spiking ability), and receiving (how well the team plays an opponent's serve or hit). Oddly enough, each team appears to be composed of twins, but with palette-swapped clothing, hair, and skin. Players can compete or team up against the computer and there are two scoring systems (normal and rally point) and three difficulty levels. The standard moves of real volleyball are here, including serving (flat and jump), receiving, setting, blocking, spiking, and diving for balls about to hit the ground. The elevated view is from the side, and the action scrolls horizontally to show the entire court. Although unlicensed and somewhat limited in nature (there's only one court and no tournament mode), this cartridge plays a decent game of beach volleyball. Now, about that racy box art . . .

Notable Quotable:

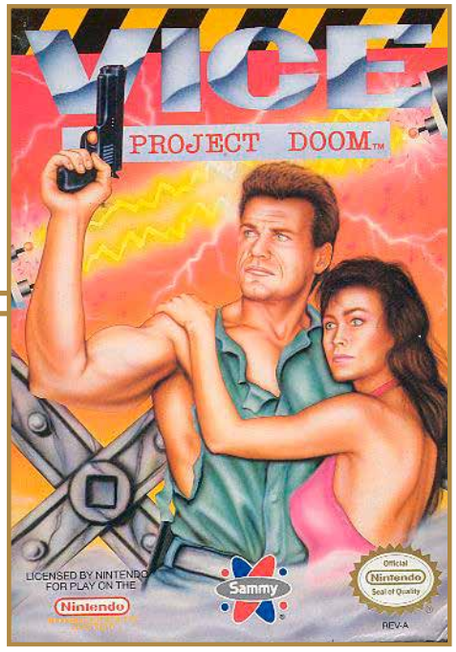
"The game automatically switches to your partner when you pass the ball and a magical cursor appears to inform you where the ball is going to land. The latter is genius, and also necessary, as the ball frequently exits your line of sight . . . For a game as energetic and fast paced as volleyball, *Venice Beach* feels stilted and lifeless. The characters shuffle slowly around the court, except when they dive. There's no crowd noise to sweep you into the game, just an upbeat ditty looking for a place to belong. The most exciting/confusing aspect of the game is when a crab collects the volleyball and walks off screen." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

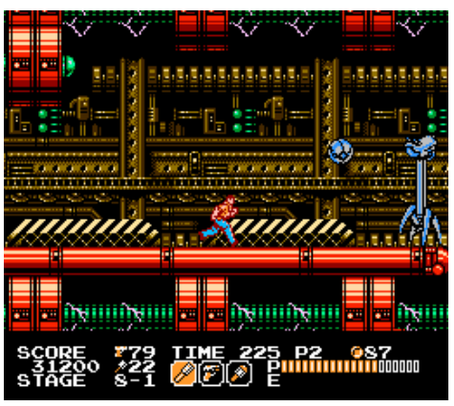
"Gameplay is passable, though not without its quirks and faults. This is a video game that feels unrefined, like the mechanics could have used a bit more tooling. For example gravity is inconsistent: The ball in its mid-air arc will rise slowly before suddenly plummeting, and volleyballers jumping for a spike seem to hang at their apex for a conveniently floaty length of time . . . a mixed bag in the visuals department. Some of the touches are nice, like the stencil letter title screen on a beachy backdrop, or the pixel granulation used in the sand. But other flourishes fall flat, like the green scorekeeper lady, or the way a teammate may disappear for a few moments . . . the background music during gameplay is dull." —Oval Pike (ovalpike.com)

Vice: Project Doom

PUBLISHER: American Sammy.
DEVELOPER: Aicom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Demolition/Combat Racing/First-Person Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



An exciting game with lots of variety, *Vice: Project Doom* begins with players driving up the screen (top-down à la *Spy Hunter*), shooting at enemy vehicles. The action then switches to a side-scrolling perspective (as in *Ninja Gaiden*), with gamers jumping on platforms and over gaps and sparks, climbing ladders, riding on conveyor belts, and using a nifty laser whip, grenades, and a .44 magnum to fend off flying creatures, thugs on pogo sticks, and other enemies. There's also first-person shooter action (similar to *Operation Wolf*) in which gamers guide a cursor around the side-scrolling screen, blowing away bad guys, destroying backgrounds, and gaining power-ups. The storyline, which is told through cutscenes, revolves around the manufacturing of an alien-produced gel that is addicting and lethal to humans.



Notable Quotable:
"This game is a synthesis of film noir, midnight movies, racing, action platforming, and first person shooting. It might be one of the weirdest games for this system and it looks beautiful on top of that. It's like if John Carpenter made a video game." —Cameron Kunzelman (www.pastemagazine.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Loaded with action, plot twists, and thrill-packed stages. Most of the game takes place in the classic running and jumping side view. Some stages, though, look at the action from a totally different angle. Overhead driving scenes and first person perspective keep the game new and exciting." —*Nintendo Power* (May 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"As much as *Nintendo Power* tried to hype it up, *Vice: Project Doom* sadly fell into obscurity very quickly. *Vice* may have ripped off a few other games—*Ninja Gaiden*, *Spy Hunter*, *Operation Wolf*—but possessing such a wide variety of genres and doing them well makes *Vice* worth playing." —*Video Game Collector* #7 (Winter 2007)

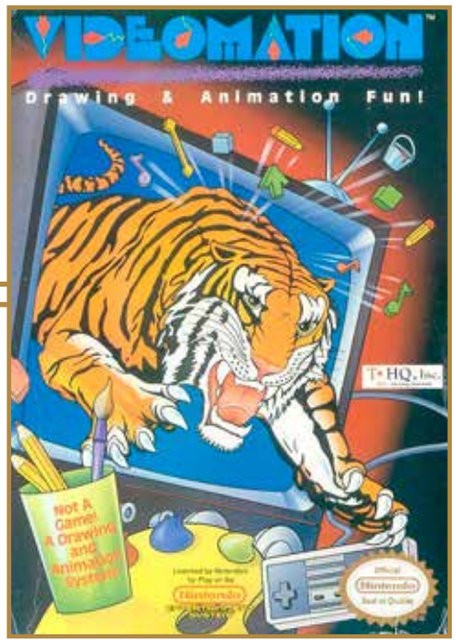
Notable Quotable:
"One of the most overlooked and underappreciated third party game designs to ever hit the NES, even after claiming a cover of *Nintendo Power* in 1991. That's a shame, because its blend of three different types of gameplay set it apart from the crowd and made it a classic." —IGN (www.ign.com), which ranked *Vice: Project Doom* the 47th-greatest NES game

Insider Insight: I totally underestimated *Vice: Project Doom*. I remember seeing the cover art in *Nintendo Power* as a child, but when I came across the copy I now own I didn't really know anything about it. I popped it in and the first stage was a driving stage, so I assumed that must be the format for the entire game. Whatever, not my thing—on the shelf it went, at least until a few months later. Imagine my surprise when I beat the first level and all of a sudden I was in an action-packed platformer! Even farther into the game there are third person scrolling shooting sections. I've always been a big fan of games that make use of multiple genres and this game really delivers in that department. The graphics are nice and stylish, the music is catchy, and overall it's just a fantastic game. Whenever anyone asks me to recommend an obscure NES game the first title that comes to mind is *Vice: Project Doom*. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Videomation

PUBLISHER: THQ.
DEVELOPER: FarSight Studios.
GAME TYPE: Art, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



Videomation is a virtual drawing and painting kit that enables you to create works of art on your television screen. Using the control pad you can draw with a pencil, or you can use other video tools to help you draw straight lines, curves, circles, or squares. You can also choose how fast and in what color you wish to draw. When painting you are given a variety of (mostly pastel) colors to choose from, and you can change the entire color scheme of your work of art at any time. In addition to painting and drawing you can add stickers (faces, hearts, etc.) and animations (dogs, a girl jumping rope, etc.) to your masterpiece. If you make a mistake you can erase parts of the picture, or you can clear the entire screen. The best thing about *Videomation* is its versatility. With a little patience and a steady hand you can literally draw (or try to draw) any two-dimensional thing you want. You can draw very slowly with a thin line for detail work, or you can paint in broad strokes. The animations and stickers are childish and rather limited in subject matter, but your imagination and ability are the only limits in terms of the actual artwork. The music is nothing elaborate, but it is clever how it travels up the scale of notes as you draw upward and lower as you draw downward. The color schemes could use some bright reds and yellows to jazz things up a bit and the stickers and animations are unnecessarily simplistic. There is no battery backup so you can't save your drawings or paintings. However, you can record your work using a VCR (that's video cassette recorder to you kiddoes out there), which of course you can do with any video game.

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Unlike the glorified coloring book *Color a Dinosaur*, *Videomation* allows you to draw your own dinosaurs; ones that don't resemble *We're Back* rejects . . . essentially a Microsoft Paint program from Windows 3.0 shoved into your NES . . . There are unnerving stamps of random images, like teddy bears, the sun, and a guy driving a car, with which to garnish your masterpiece. Creepiest of all are simple, repetitive animations—images of a child crawling or a bunny hopping—that you insert on top of the drawing . . . The kiddy stamps and animations scream '*Videomation* is for children!,' but if you choose not to use those it's a decent all ages paint program . . . The colors look washed out, but that has more to do with the NES' limitations than the game itself." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

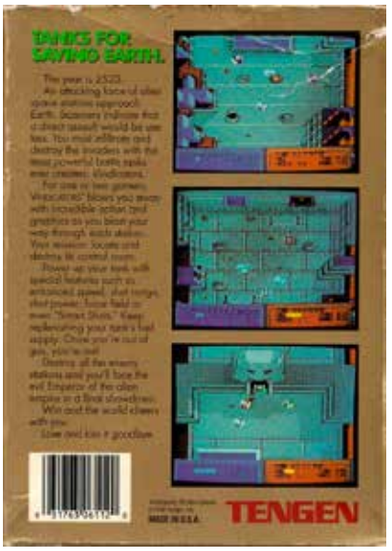
Insider Insight: According to the cartridge label *Videomation* isn't even a video game. If anything, it's a primitive "paint shop" program with some canned animation elements and bland palette presets. None of those shortcomings deterred me from spending untold hours drawing on my TV screen with an NES controller. I got this game for Christmas the same year I received *Super Mario Bros. 2*, so admittedly *Videomation* was ignored initially. However, a few nights afterward my mother coaxed me into giving it a try. She'd hoped that I would enjoy the game, my being an aspiring artist.

It took a little trial and error, but I soon discovered that the game's limited tool set was actually much more appropriate for creating pixel art rather than line art. I created portraits and still life imagery, and I learned a great deal about how color palettes on the NES hardware actually worked under the hood. The real learning experience with *Videomation*, though, was in preserving work I created. The cartridge had no save feature, as full screen images required too much memory for the battery backed storage available to NES developers. The game's manual contained instructions for capturing footage of your work with a VCR. It was certainly a contrived process, but I remember the sense of accomplishment I felt the first time I "recorded" a piece of my art and played it back to show off.

Looking back now after having spent the majority of my life as an artist, I am surprisingly grateful for this game. In a way it was my parents encouraging me in my dream of being an artist and a game developer. How grateful I am that they have always been so supportive of me and my admittedly unnatural love of video games! —Kale Menges, artist and game developer

Vindicators

PUBLISHER: Tengen.
DEVELOPER: Westwood Studios.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Tank Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.



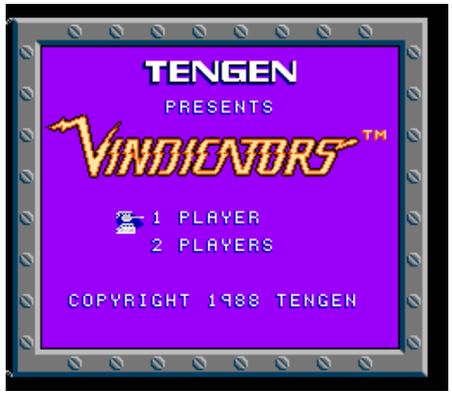
Vindicators is a port of Atari's 1988 arcade game, which benefited from dual joystick control that let you strafe and move the turret independently. The coin-op also had detailed onscreen instructions and a much cooler title screen. The game has you driving a battle tank that can rotate and fire in all directions through 14 labyrinthine space stations viewed from overhead. You'll shoot tanks, turrets, mines, and flying saucers while gathering up fuel and battle stars, the latter of which are used to upgrade/customize the tank's speed, fuel, shot range, shot power, shot speed, and force shields. Battle stars are also good for purchasing smart shots (which track most any type of enemy) and bomb cannons. Enemy bosses, including Sentry Robot and Mega-Brain, guard doorways between each space station, and it is necessary to pick up keys to progress from level to level. Destroying space station control centers plays a factor as well.

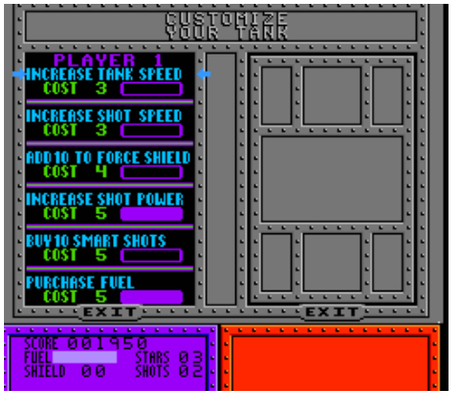
In two-player mode, shooting the other player's tank transfers fuel from the shooter tank to the tank that has been shot. The game is set in 2525, amid a massive force of alien space stations attacking Earth. Despite the aforementioned shortcomings when compared to the arcade game, and the fact that this cartridge is unlicensed, it's not a bad port.

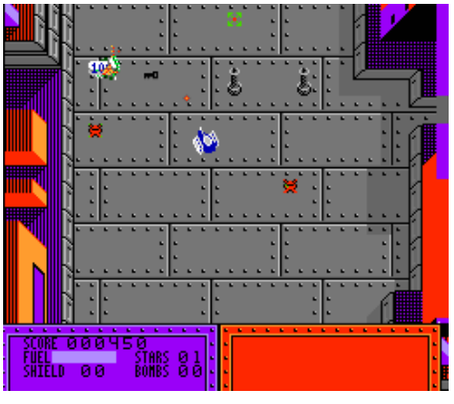
Memories: The thing that most impressed me about *Vindicators* when I finally played it back in the late '90s is the way the various power-ups work in conjunction with one another. If you increase your shield power it reduces your rate of fuel loss. If you increase your shot range it reduces your need to get close to an enemy, thereby saving wear and tear on your shields. This type of intermingling of the power-ups adds a strategic angle missing from most other games of this genre. I also like the fuel transferal method, which is great for bailing the other player out when he or she is running low. Or you can fight over fuel and power-ups.

Notable Quotable:
"This simultaneous two-player tank blasting game first appeared in 1988 and has not lost anything through time. The power-ups can turn your tank into an immense killing machine. A good game in one player mode—an incredible game in two-player mode."—*Raze* (January 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"The NES version of *Vindicators* actually differs somewhat from the arcade original, as it features slightly different levels, a simpler control method, and longer times for completing each stage . . . The original coin-op was actually available as a conversion kit for *Gauntlet*, and this comes as no surprise when you see the maze-like nature of *Vindicators*." —Hey Poor Player (www.heypoorplayer.com)



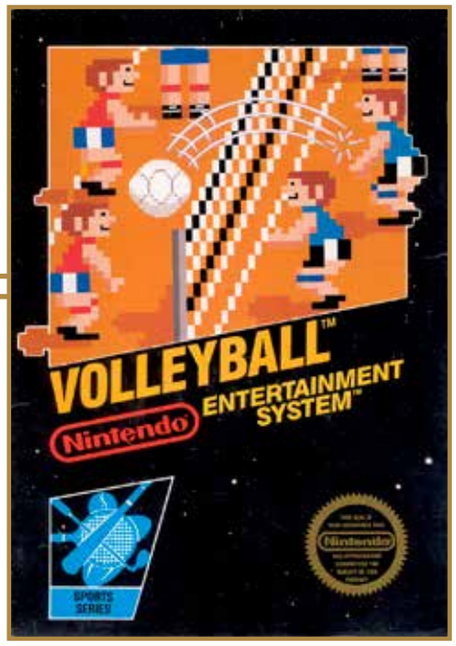


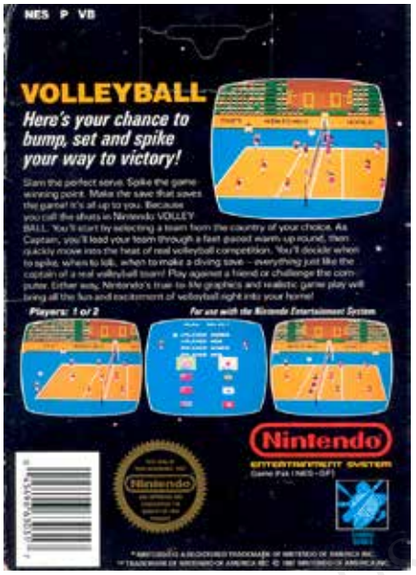


SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Volleyball

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1 / Pax Softnica.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Volleyball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.





Featuring six-on-six action, this indoor volleyball game lets players compete as the men's or women's US team (they only vary in appearance, not playability) against seven different countries: Russia, China, Cuba, Japan, Brazil, Korea, and Tunisia. The Training mode is for practice, while the Game mode presents a tougher challenge. There is no tournament option. Players can block spikes, vary the strength and direction of serves, and set the ball high or low. They can also spike right or left, feint (put across a soft drop shot), and spike the ball hard enough to knock an opponent down. As in real volleyball, to play the game well you'll want to get into the habit of bumping the ball, setting it, and then spiking it. Also authentic is that the ball can deflect off the net. The elevated view of the game is from the side and the screen scrolls horizontally to show the entire court.

Notable Quotable:

"The most feature-filled and realistic of any volleyball game we've played . . . has all the excitement of an international match . . . At first glance the slightly over-large ball seems out of proportion to the players, but we came to appreciate its size as we began playing because its size makes it easier to see and work with. The well-animated players are very lively . . . Sound effects are quite good, although we could have done without the musical accompaniment during the actual game." —*Computer Entertainer* (May 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"It may look awful, but *Volleyball* isn't so bad once you get the hang of it . . . Spikes are tough to execute because you need to time your leaps perfectly. It's undeniably satisfying when you execute one, though, especially when you nail some poor schmuck in the face. *Volleyball* is mildly entertaining against a friend or the computer, but I should point out a few issues with the game's design. First, you control three players at a time, but don't know which trio will be selected until the last possible instant. Second, the high-flying ball often goes off the top of the screen, which is seriously problematic when you're trying to time a spike . . . there are better volleyball titles for the NES." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

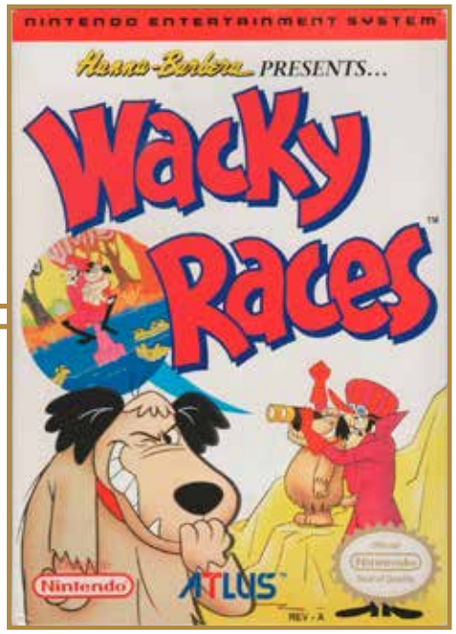
Notable Quotable:

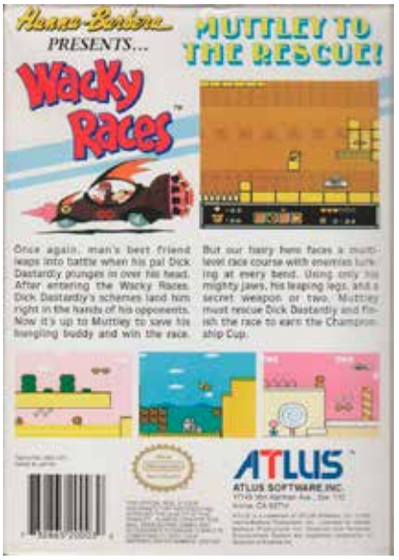
"The controls are fiddly and unintuitive, so for the first few games you'll likely be thinking more about which button to press rather than reacting. Spikes can be problematic to pull off as the ball's apex is much higher than the camera angle allows; as a result you'll need to rely on some guesswork to time your jumps and spikes. When you do get the hang of things the game is mildly entertaining, especially as you learn to set up and spike with precision. It's satisfying when you do manage to whack the ball over the net while knocking an opponent down! The computer doesn't always select the best teammate, though . . . Two-player mode is fun . . . it's amusing to line up for a spike, only to cheekily attempt a drop shot." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wacky Races

PUBLISHER: Atlus.
DEVELOPER: Atlus.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.





Despite being based on the classic Hanna-Barbera racing cartoon, which ran for 17 episodes in 1968, *Wacky Races* for the NES is not a racing game. Rather, it's a standard (if cute, colorful, and enjoyable) platformer in which you guide Muttley through such areas as a desert, a castle, a forest, an island, downtown, an ice village, a mountain, and a western town. These are accessible by selecting one of three worlds from a map: Hip Hop, Splish Splash, and Go Go America. Muttley runs and swims, and he jumps over a variety of obstacles, including cacti, spikes, houses, and enemy projectiles. He can crouch, and he uses a weak, short-range bite attack to battle crabs, fish, cats, snowmen, snakes, shades-wearing flowers, and other enemies. By gathering bones you can trade them in *Gradius*-like fashion for an arcing bomb attack, a linear barking attack (called BOW), the ability to glide with Muttley's tail, and extra health. Other racers from the TV show, such as Peter Perfect and The Gruesome Twosome, act as bosses. Muttley's ultimate goal in this hard-to-find game is to rescue his nefarious boss, Dick Dastardly.

Memories: I loved watching the *Wacky Races* cartoon when I was a kid, despite the fact that I wondered why Dick Dastardly didn't simply race to the finish line when he got way ahead of the rest of the pack. Instead of taking an easy win he would stop down to set traps for the other racers, a plan that would always backfire. I would go to my best friend Gerald's house next door and we would draw the characters and their cars while we watched the program. This was well over a decade before the NES game came out.

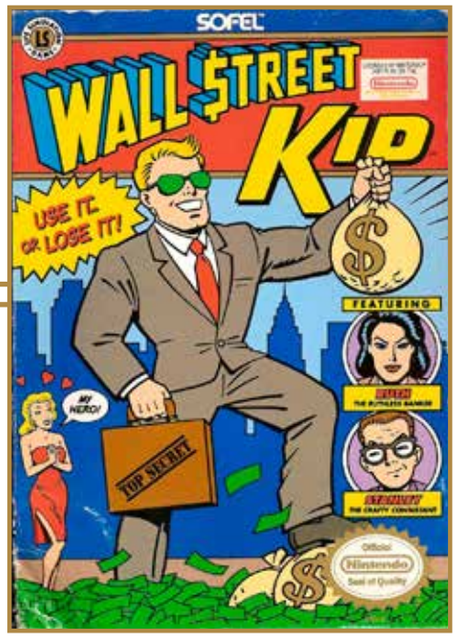
Notable Quotable:
"This is a really cute game with cool sound effects. The graphics are funny and the characters are well-drawn. Muttley will bring you back to your early childhood years when he snickers in his own special way. The control is good, and if you loved the Saturday morning cartoon you will like the Nintendo game." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"A short and easy platformer . . . well-designed and capable of providing a decent bit of entertainment . . . simple charm. Each of the 10 levels looks different and is divided into multiple parts. Muttley's opposition varies from level to level as well, which at least gives the illusion you're doing something different in each stage. Sure, for the most part you're running and jumping from left to right on the screen while avoiding or disposing of foes, but when the monsters and locales are constantly changing it at least tricks me into not realizing that most of the game's 'variety' is superficial . . . the only levels that I didn't enjoy were the ones most different from the rest. One stage had Muttley spending some time underwater, where he swam instead of walked. I found it to be as dull and easy as any underwater level I'd experienced in a platformer." —Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wall Street Kid

PUBLISHER: Sofel.
DEVELOPER: Sofel.
GAME TYPE: Business Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



Just in case you didn't buy your NES to play *Mario* or *Zelda* you can check out this cartoonish, point-and-click stock market simulator where you buy, sell, and trade stocks—blue chip, speculative, cyclical, and growth—from such semifamiliar companies as YBM, Yapple, and American Depress. Armed with $500,000 at the beginning of the game, you must invest wisely to make your assets grow so you can purchase a mansion, a yacht, and a castle. To help facilitate the process you can consult the *Wall Street Times* and get advice from Connie the Arrogant Advisor and Ruth the Ruthless Banker. As a well-rounded businessman you can also keep physically fit by swimming, going to the gym, and hiking, and you can take your girlfriend shopping, or to a picnic or carnival.

Notable Quotable:

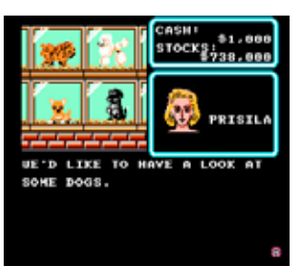
"*Wall Street Kid* was probably something parents bought their kids hoping they could actually learn something from playing video games. After the initial birthday party disappointment wore off we imagine kids eventually warmed up to the funny dialogue and addicting nature of money making." —*Game Informer* (December 2007)

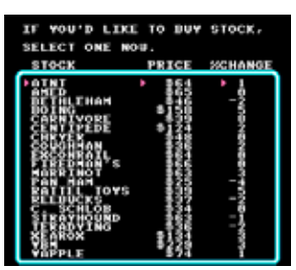
Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are passable, consisting mainly of blocky 8-bit portraits of your apartment and acquaintances . . . The humor of the game is painfully dry and feels like a decent translation of very bad writing. As a result characters attempt to drop quips that fall flat and can even be quite insulting. They rarely manage to be intentionally funny, usually just delivering their lines in a way that makes you want to back out of the office slowly . . . the few simple tracks of the game's music will be permanently stuck in your head . . . give this title a wide berth . . . mercifully short, provided you make the right choices . . . lacks any real replay value." —Bradley Robbins (www.heypoorplayer.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The very existence of *Wall Street Kid* is a head-scratcher . . . in 1989, when gaming was aimed a bit more at a younger audience, it's even more baffling to imagine such a concept actually came to fruition . . . basically a simplistic, point-and-click RPG of sorts . . . there is a minor addictive quality in trying to keep up with the stock market and seeing how things play out, but it's short lived . . . when the sole input of gameplay is selecting the same few items from the same few menus over and over again the game's sheer monotony is quickly exposed. And it really doesn't help things that the same, short loop of obnoxious music plays over the entire game. Yes, I've played more technically 'broken' video games, but few are as tedious as *Wall Street Kid*." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)





Insider Insight: Memories aren't always fond; sometimes they're inflammatory.

The mere existence of Wall Street Kid is flabbergasting, given the fact that thousands of nuanced steps were taken to manifest its very existence.

I contend that no "kid" is intrigued by investment banking—and if they, by sheer negligence of natural evolutionary biology, happened to develop a romantic passion for mortgage defaults and extravagant cocaine parties, there's at least some light blame to be paid to inbreeding.

One could argue that this game was never targeted toward the core contingent of NES players being children, but instead, it was an "adult" game—and that the ESRB being years away from formation meant, "Say, what about calling it, Wall Street Man?," would have never been an executive note. Instead, the only notes here are in the form of cold, hard cash…because why teach a kiddo about the value of a quarter when locked, long term interest rates are the stuff of piggy bank legend?

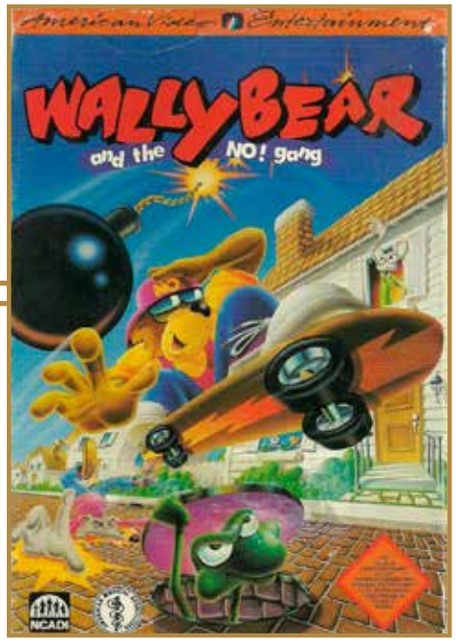
All joking aside, a well-rounded education is the best one, and if you're going to send a young person on a path of unscrupulous morals, just remember—white collar prisons have fluffier mattresses and champagne brunch every other Sunday.

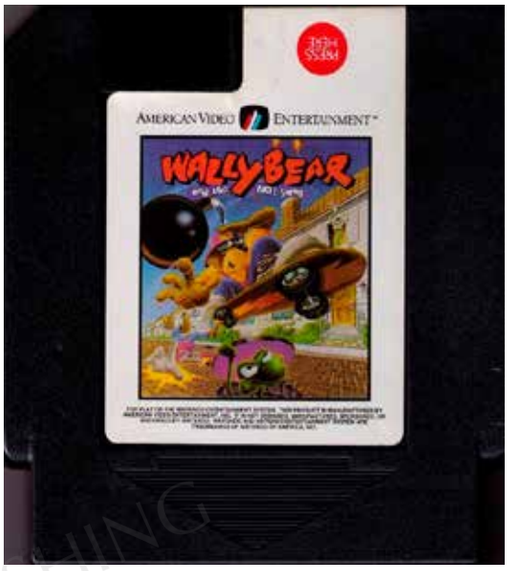
—Jon M. Gibson, Co-Owner/Co-Creative Director of iam8bit (iam8bit.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wally Bear and the NO! Gang

PUBLISHER: American Video Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: American Game Cartridges.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1992.



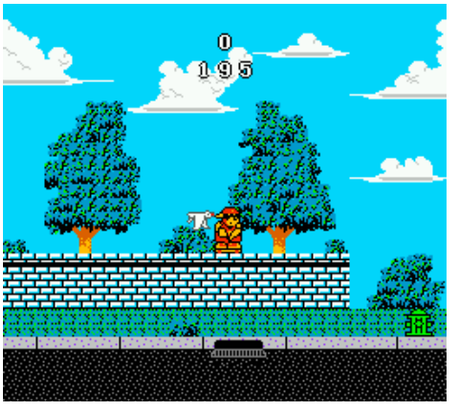


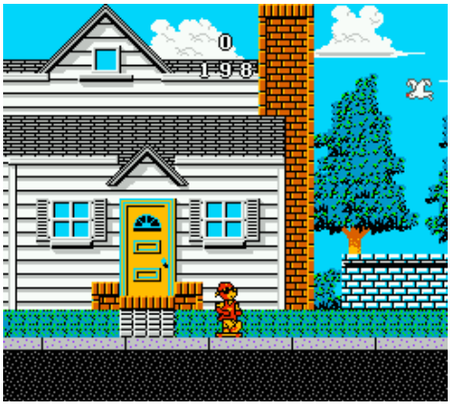
As Wally Bear, you take off on your skateboard to go to a party your Uncle Gary Grizzly is having across town. You skate to the right, jumping over or otherwise dodging such obstacles as balls, bats, birds, snakes, guard dogs, dripping toxic waste, and bombs thrown by Ricky Rat. Larry Lizard and Willard Weasel also make your life difficult. To battle the baddies you can pick up and throw such flying discs as pizzas, Frisbees, and hubcaps. Picking up additional discs lets you throw your discs faster. Collecting skateboards makes you skate faster and jump higher. You'll also enter doors and jump up on walls. The mission in the game, which is composed of seven levels of play, is to save Toby Turtle from Ricky Rat. The manual and the game contain antidrug messages, some of which are unintentionally humorous.

Notable Quotable:
"The skating's vaguely reminiscent of *Skate or Die*, and that's pretty good . . . *Wally Bear*, like Life cereal, is good for you—and fun. The graphics are decent, but the music sounds like a Playskool tune. Hopefully, through Wally, you'll see that it's cool to say 'NO' to drugs." —*GamePro* (May 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Every bird and attack dog on the block wants you dead, and there's not a whole lot you can do about that besides just jump for your life . . . The levels are incredibly repetitive. The same backgrounds are used over and over again, kind of like in a *Flintstones* cartoon . . . The only difference is that *The Flintstones* was entertaining . . . The music in this game just (expletive) sucks . . . makes you want to puke . . . Turn down the volume, and while you're at it, turn off the (expletive) game." —Angry Video Game Nerd (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"I don't have anything against video game designers attempting to insert uplifting, motivational messages in their games—but they better make sure they have a fun game built around what they're preaching. The first few levels are pitifully easy and repetitive as hell. Then, towards the end, the difficulty level reaches the WTF?!? phase that horrid NES games seemingly took pride in achieving, as Wally, who isn't the easiest guy to control in mid-air, is stuck doing a number of precise jumps with death being the price of failure." —Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)

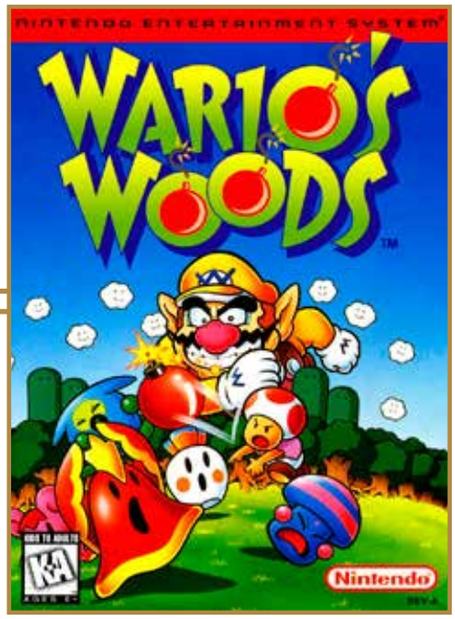


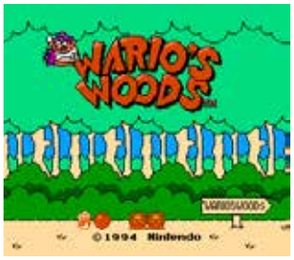


SCHOLASTIC PUBLISHING

Wario's Woods

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.





Wario's Woods was the last licensed NES game released in North America, and it's therefore a tough game to find (the Super NES version had wider distribution). It's a clever and engaging take on the "falling block" subgenre invented by *Tetris*. As bombs provided by Sprite and monsters unleashed by Black Bat descend from the sky, Toad must scurry about, arranging them in groupings of three or more (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) to make them vanish. Toad can climb, kick objects, move stacks, and more. For the bombs and monsters to disappear they must be of the same color, and at least one bomb must be in the line. Pulling off chain reactions, eliminating diamonds, and making rows of monsters disappear cause special/strategic things to occur, such as raising the ceiling (the fiendish boss Wario is on hand to lower the ceiling) or turning the opponent's bombs into diamonds (in two-player split screen action). There are boss battles as well, against such characters as Fauster (wields a devil's pitchfork), Goro (a monster), Seizer (looks like the Grim Reaper), Boom (a horned pig creature), Mad (a mermaid), and Drago (a dragon). Game modes include VS Battle, Time Race, Round Game (where Toad must clear numerous levels), and Lesson (for practicing).

Notable Quotable:

"A fun, addictive puzzle game that's worthy of its role as the NES' swan song. It isn't as immediately accessible as *Dr. Mario*, as combo-friendly as *Puyo-Puyo*, or as timeless as *Tetris*, but it stands out from the crowd with a totally unique hook, inventive boss battles, and surprisingly deep gameplay. The unorthodox control is a bit of a barrier to entry, but players who persevere will be well rewarded; retro-curious falling block fans looking for something completely different will have a great time with this one-of-a-kind puzzler." —Morgan Sleeper (www.nintendolife.com), reviewing the NES game downloaded to the Wii U

Notable Quotable:

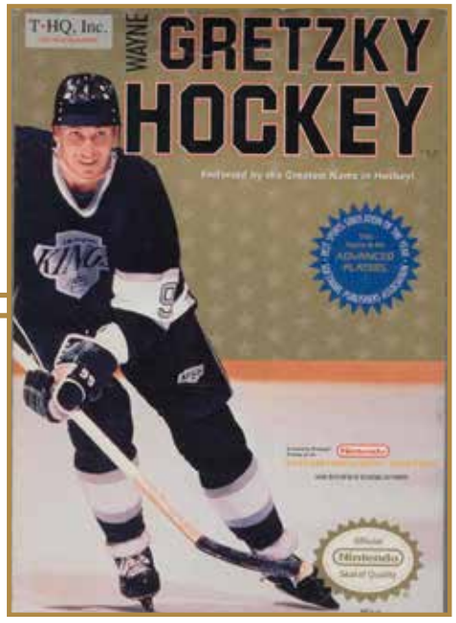
"Deceptively simple to play . . . a control scheme that's both surprisingly complex and completely intuitive . . . surprising level of depth . . . just when you think you've got the game pegged the stages get more frantic, and your survival will hinge upon how quickly you can execute each subtle trick. And you have another incentive to complete each stage as expediently as possible: a number of gold tokens are awarded to Toad if he finishes the stage (re: kills all the bad guys on the screen) within a certain amount of time. Enough of these coins translate into game continues. You'll need these continues . . . colorful and well-animated sprites typical of the 8-bit Mario platformers. Good tunes; the tension increases palpably when Wario enters the top of the screen and his theme music starts up . . . It's not *Tetris*, but it's remarkably addictive and absorbingly puzzling. The two-player mode adds a lot of depth." —Christian Huey (formerly at allgame.com)

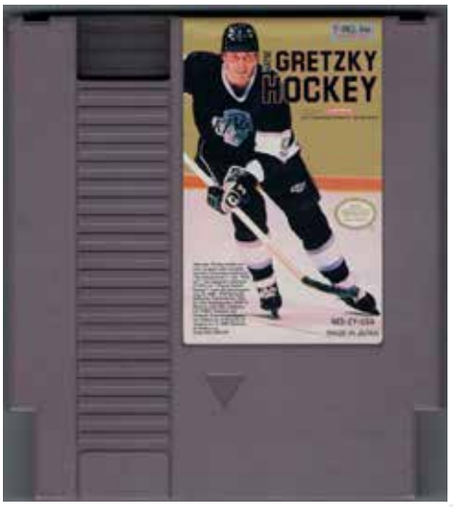
Insider Insight: Despite being released as the last commercially available NES title and the only original 8-bit Nintendo game to feature an ESRB rating, *Wario's Woods* created some heated multiplayer matches back in the day and quickly became my go-to game over *Dr. Mario*. What makes *Wario's Woods* so compelling is the ability to fix the stacks and pieces that fall in the well at any time. In *Tetris*, for example, if you accidentally drop your piece in the wrong location you just have to deal with it. *Wario's Woods* changes all that by giving Toad, your playable cursor, the capability of dealing with mistakes and fast drops as long as you are quick enough to react. Lost games are usually your own fault, which is why *Wario's Woods* can yield some pretty creative smack talk. It is a puzzle game like no other, and it's a shame this concept has not been replicated to this day. The SNES version is superior thanks to a better musical score, stat tracking, and more face buttons for easier control, but the NES rendition has earned its place in history for being released under unique circumstances and providing one last excuse to keep the NES connected to the TV. —Zachary Gasiorowski, Editor in Chief of myGamer.com; follow on Twitter @ZackGaz

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wayne Gretzky Hockey

PUBLISHER: THQ.
DEVELOPER: Bethesda Softworks.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Hockey, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.





Adapted from the 1988 computer game, *Wayne Gretzky Hockey* lets you shoot, pass, demand passes from teammates, check opponents, and commit penalties, including charging, holding, tripping, cross-checking, elbowing, high sticking, hooking, roughing, and slashing. There are face offs as well. Strangely enough, you press the select button to change the player on your team that you are controlling. Options you can choose from include period length (5, 10, 15, or 20 minutes), game speed (slow, medium, and fast), and game type: Practice, Normal, and Playoff. In two-player mode gamers can go at it head to head or team up against the computer. The hockey rink is viewed from a top-down perspective, scrolling right and left and slightly up and down to show the entire playfield. Judging by all the hate this game gets, it's hard to believe the "Great One" endorsed it, but there he is, right on the box and cartridge.

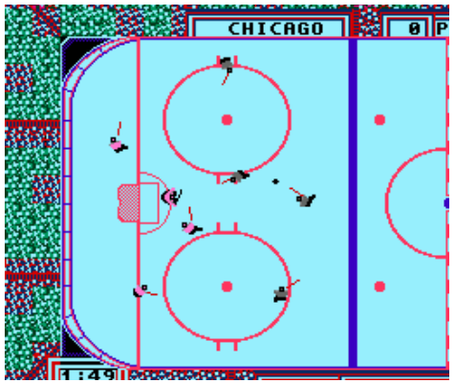
Memories: Back in the early '90s, a friend of mine named Russ would drop by the comic book store I owned after work and hang out. He'd gripe about his job at the airport, buy some Punisher comic books, and talk about his favorite athlete of all time, Wayne Gretzky. Russ was a gamer from way back—he's the guy who gave me his Atari 5200 with games and a trackball when he got tired of playing it—so it's suspicious that he never mentioned The Great One's NES game. Perhaps even Russ, a diehard fan who thought Wayne could do no wrong, knew the game was a stinker. If I ever see Russ again I'll have to ask him about it.

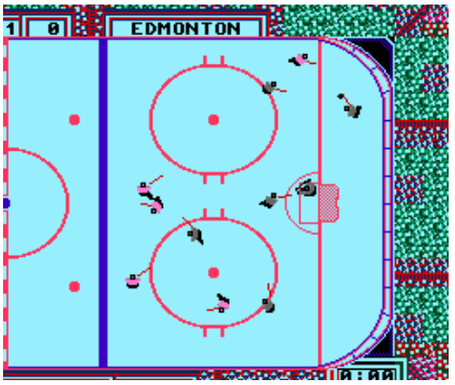
Notable Quotable:

"Don't buy this game, don't accept it as a gift, and certainly don't play it unless you can't believe it's really this bad. Play *Pro Sport Hockey*, *Blades of Steel*, or *Ice Hockey*—they're all fun. Just don't play *Wayne Gretzky Hockey*. The cover looks cool with a nice picture of Wayne, but don't be fooled." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics and sounds are both below average. The players are very tiny, and their movements are choppy . . . The sounds are worse, with VERY annoying music on the title screen and blah sound effects throughout the game. There's no in-game music except for the face offs; you're mainly left with barely audible crowd noise and a horrible horn that blares when you make a goal. At least the two voice clips saying 'He shoots!' and 'Scores!' are decent . . . the controls are terrible . . . your teammates seem to aimlessly wander around in circles most of the time without a clue what to do, and they seem to pass the puck in random directions . . . It seems ironic that the greatest hockey player of all time would lend his name to the worst hockey game ever." —NES Times (www.nestimes.net/games)

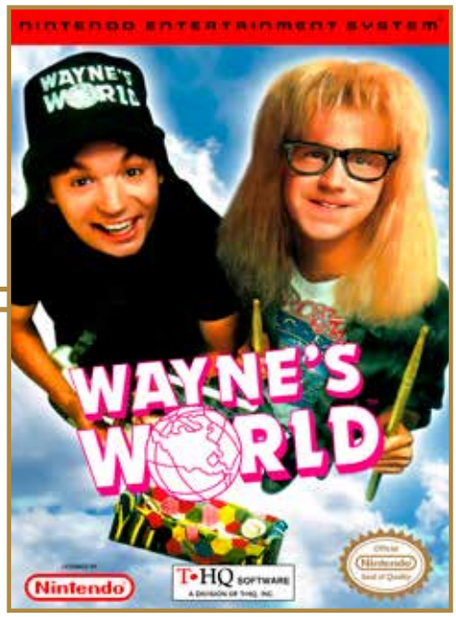


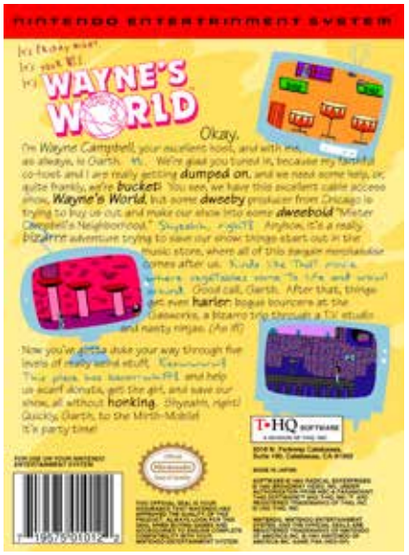


SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wayne's World

PUBLISHER: THQ Software.
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.





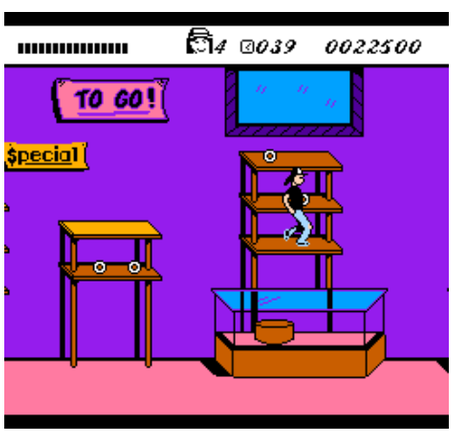
Based on the 1992 feature film, which in turn was based on a recurring *Saturday Night Live* skit, *Wayne's World* lets you control Wayne or Garth, depending on which section of which level you are in. The boys are trying to save their TV show. Garth uses a taser gun to shoot the musical instruments (including flying, snapping cymbals, and a walking guitar that shoots notes), ninja warriors, bouncers, cats, spiders, a fat guy who throws bottles, and other enemies he'll encounter while Wayne employs a less effective kicking maneuver. Both can duck under objects, enter doors, and jump across gaps, onto ledges, and the like. Levels, which are timed, include Kramer's Music Store, Stan Mikita's Donut Shop, The Gasworks, Alleyway, Benjamin's Chicago Studio, and Benjamin's Condo. Between level bonus rounds let you acquire health upgrades, as does defeating black cats. The action is limited in nature—your simple objective is to get past a couple of different enemy types in each stage and make it to the door at the end—and the game is short and easy to beat. The game, which is hard to find, is most definitely not excellent, but it does have Wayne and Garth cutscenes and sound samples.

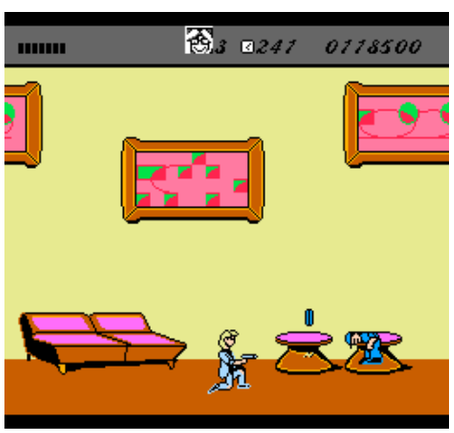
Notable Quotable:

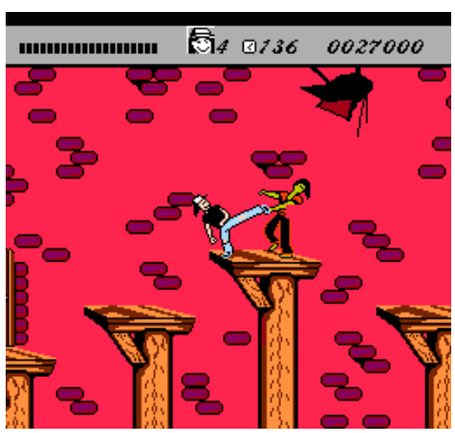
"Wayne's kicks feature input lag . . . even if your foot is clearly overlapping an enemy sprite the game often refuses to register . . . clearly a quick cash-in game . . . little more than a proof-of-concept demo. The poor level design shows that barely any thought was put into combining stages with the abilities of each character, and when coupled with the broken combat and platforming mechanics, this is a rather unappealing game to play." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:

"There's virtually no challenge—the enemies are dodge-able, hit-able, and beatable . . . Great graphics—NOT! If you wondered why the NES is becoming extinct, take a look at these flat backgrounds and undetailed sprites . . . As bad as the graphics are, the sounds are even worse. For two guys who love cool music, Wayne and Garth do their fighting to a pretty cheesy soundtrack. The boing and ping sound effects are reminiscent of mid-'80s games, and the only vocal is Wayne's cry of 'No way!' when you lose . . . *Wayne's World* is a cart you wish you could like, if only because there's the potential for good natured fun with these average joe heroes. And with so few NES carts coming out every game needs to be a hit to keep the system alive. Sadly *Wayne's World* is not nearly as cool as Wayne thinks it is." —*GamePro* (March 1994)



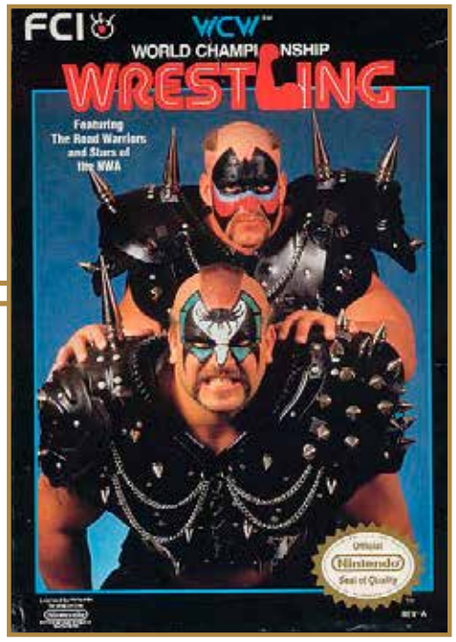


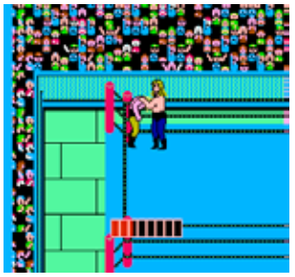


FISCHER PUBLISHING

WCW: World Championship Wrestling

PUBLISHER: FCI.
DEVELOPER: Nihon Bussan.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Wrestling, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



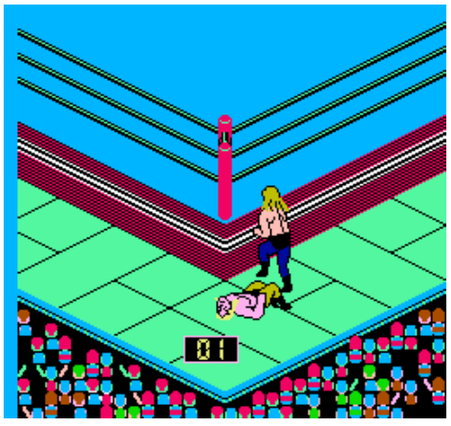


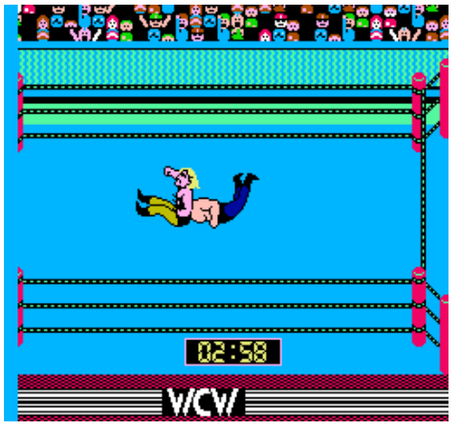
Featuring spiffy voice effects, *WCW: World Championship Wrestling* offers a series of one-on-one fights against 12 large wrestlers from the National Wrestling Alliance: Ric Flair, Sting, Lex Luger, Mike Rotunda, Road Warrior "Hawk," Road Warrior "Animal," Steve Williams, Kevin Sullivan, Ricky Steamboat, Rick Steiner, Eddie Gilbert, and Michael Hayes. Plus there's an unlockable character called the WCW Master. Tag team matches are included, as are a variety of standard wrestling moves, such as punches, kicks, head butts, body slams, hammer throws, flying moves, and grapples. Each wrestler has eight favorite moves, and you can select four of these moves per wrestler, per match. The brawlers are somewhat similar in appearance, but each has a unique special move, such as jumping neck breaker drop, neck wringer, jumping elbow drop, or double arm suplex. Wrestlers can also climb out of the ring to go grab a weapon. The elevated view is from the side, and the screen scrolls horizontally a bit to show the entire ring as you battle it out. You can play a single match or a tag team match against the computer or another player.

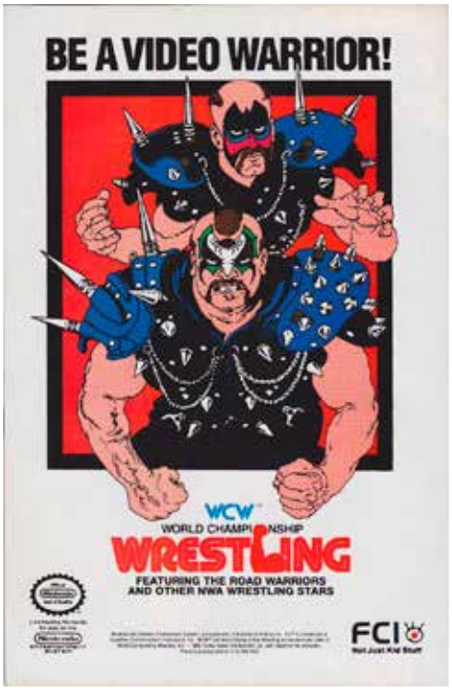
Notable Quotable:
"Like other wrestling games, controlling all the moves takes practice and the game is more fun to play against a friend. However, one neat aspect of *WCW* is a computer opponent that reacts realistically." —*Nintendo Power* (May 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Once you learn the proper methods of insinuating attacks this game becomes a load of fun. It has a much greater attention to detail, both in terms of animation and gameplay, than similar efforts and promises to delight wrestling fans who got burned with *WWF Wrestlemania*." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"One of the best covers in early video game history and the novelty of being the only WCW based NES game likely lured in a number of fans. In some ways *WCW: World Championship Wrestling* delivered, in others it flopped. Unlike the *WWE* games, the wrestlers' move sets reflected real life . . . it was hard to tell the wrestlers apart once the game started . . . The game's overall awkwardness comes from it being basically a repurposed version of the Japanese game, *Super Star Pro Wrestling*. There's more to making a game feel like WCW than replacing Giant Baba with Ric Flair . . . Decent music and passable graphics are overshadowed by the frustratingly unresponsive controls." —Ryan Dilbert (bleacherreport.com)



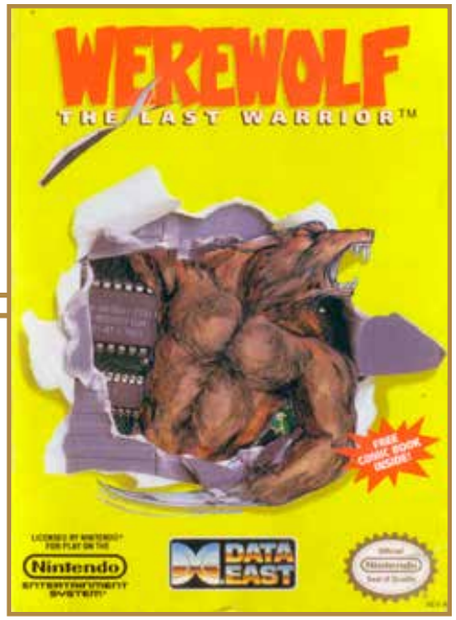




©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Werewolf: The Last Warrior

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Sakata SAS.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1990.



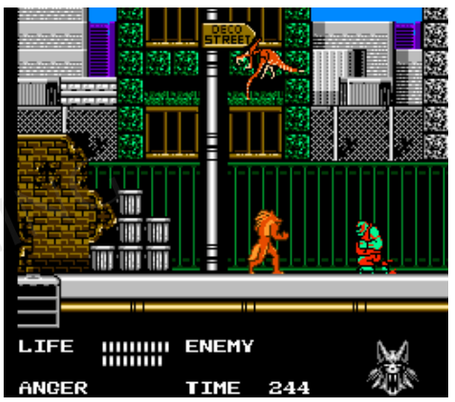
Originally packaged with a comic book, *Werewolf: The Last Warrior* puts players in the role of Chief War Wolf, who must battle his way through five short but challenging levels, punching and firing a power ray at an assortment of enemies, including bats, mutants, ninjas, baddies with jet packs, and gun-wielding soldiers. There are ladders and cliffs to climb, obstacles and gaps to jump over, toxic sludge to avoid, and more. Players begin in human form, but grabbing a red W icon transforms the character into a powerful werewolf capable of crawling, doing back flips, climbing walls, walking on the ceiling, and walking hand over hand across ravines and dangerous areas. Grabbing five white power bubbles fills an anger meter that transforms players into an even more powerful super werewolf. Other helpful items grant extra time, additional lives, temporary invincibility, and restoration of health.

Notable Quotable:

"*Werewolf* is a very good adventure game. The intermissions are always a welcome addition to any game and they are well done here. Decent gameplay and a well-tapered difficulty curve along with plenty of hidden items help keep interest up." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Enemies . . . while fun to fight are also fairly unoriginal . . . Each level is littered with uneven terrain, precarious jumps, and tons of precipices to carefully climb up and over . . . The game strikes this great balance between having to carefully prioritize every move while still pushing forward. The only respite is at the beginning of each level, where the ghost of War Wolf's former mentor from the comic, Kinjin, appears to offer some advice. The artwork for these and other intermissions are effective, and at times easily evocative of some of the darker visuals seen in *Ninja Gaiden II* . . . Unfortunately Kinjin's advice is generally less helpful than the atmosphere evoked by his appearances. Still it's a nice touch, and one of many cool details in the game . . . The game has a well-earned reputation today for being extremely challenging, but at the same time it's impressive for a one-off NES game like *Werewolf* to be difficult in a way not related to glitches or badly balanced combat . . . a polished and intense addition to the NES library." —Chris Rasa (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

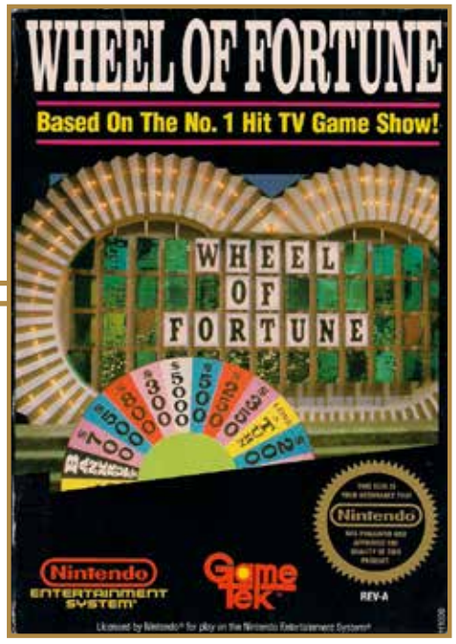


Insider Insight: The cover art alone was worth the price. A badass looking werewolf with blades for arms tearing through the front of the box? Uh, yes please and thank you. I impulse purchased this game and have always been glad I did. What I found was a super tough, but fair action game with an incredible change mechanic. Once you, Chief War Wolf, got enough red "W"s in a level you transformed into the incredibly powerful Werewolf. And it was one of the most effective power-ups from that era of gaming. I was blown away by how different and fun the werewolf was to play as. The increased agility and strength were tangible in a way that few games could match and I showed it off to friends who wanted something cool and challenging to play. I spent considerable time with the game and have always hoped for some sort of remake or sequel. Maybe one day . . . —Dan Ryan, cohost of the *Stone Age Gamer* podcast, writer of beer, wrestling, gaming, kung-fu, and other geeky articles for geekade.com

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wheel of Fortune

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.

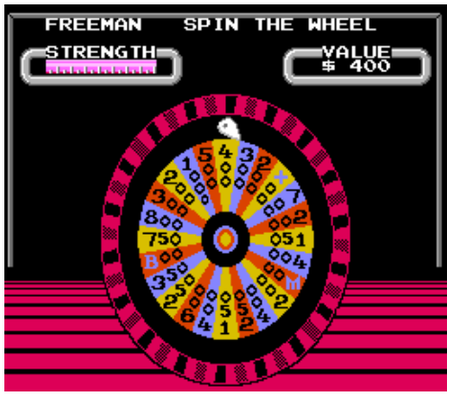


Wheel of Fortune for the NES lacks endorsement by Pat Sajak and Vanna White, the familiar faces from the beloved TV game show, but a semi-familiar-looking blonde in a dress is on hand to turn the letters (there is no Sajak substitute). As play begins gamers are shown a wall of hidden letters (blank boxes) spelling out a word or words in one of the following categories: person, people, phrase, place, event, title, or thing (there are more than 1,000 puzzles in all). To guess a consonant in the puzzle, players spin a large wheel (which appears on another screen), hoping that the wheel lands on a dollar amount or free spin (as opposed to bankrupt or lose a turn). Players can choose to buy a vowel in lieu of guessing a consonant, or they can bypass the wheel altogether and attempt to solve the puzzle. After the first two rounds play switches to a speed-up round. The fourth and final round is a bonus game in which the winner competes for valuable prizes.

Notable Quotable:

"About the only way the game doesn't mirror the version of the television show that existed at the time of its release is in the final round. On television some letters are also provided, and then players must pick three consonants and an additional vowel. Here none of that is done for you. Instead, you get to pick a few letters and run with those. As a result the puzzles are more difficult to solve than perhaps they should be . . . The buzz when you miss a guess is like nails on a chalkboard . . . What little music the game offers tends to be too fast paced for its own good, and they somehow butchered the theme song music . . . the game really isn't so bad. The lack of Pat Sajak and enemy faces is its worst flaw, and one can get over that easily enough . . . It certainly wasn't a bad translation of the show for the time." —Jason Venter (www.honestgamers.com)

Insider Insight: It's *Wheel of Fortune*, one of the most beloved game shows in NES form! This game is good, simple fun and plays just like the TV program. Spin the wheel and put your vocabulary skills to the test. This is a personal favorite of my wife and I and we play it frequently. She may or may not take away more wins than I do, but who's keeping track? My only complaint is that there's not much music during actual gameplay. It's not enough to deter from the experience, though—put on some tunes of your choice and try to win big! —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wheel of Fortune: Family Edition

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.

Wheel of Fortune: Family Edition looks and plays virtually identical to the original NES version of *Wheel of Fortune*, but with all new puzzles (more than 1,000 in all) and the addition of three new puzzle categories: things (note the plural usage), fictional person, and same name (two names or phrases both ending in a common word). In the bonus round you'll get the chance to win one of the following prizes: emerald necklace, Caribbean cruise, beach house, April in Paris, Concorde to London, or a Bentley. Despite the misleading title, *Family Edition* does not include any additional modes of play or other special features, making it something of a disappointment.

Notable Quotable:
"The closest thing to actually being there . . . With a new randomizing function added by GameTek you won't run into the same puzzle over and over, which was a problem with the original *Wheel of Fortune* Game Pak." — *Nintendo Power* (May/June 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"A solid and passable adaptation of the source material, getting by mostly on the strength of offering zippy gameplay and a sensible interface . . . What drags it down is mostly a limited selection of puzzles . . . which tend to be pretty easy to solve with only a few consonants." —Plato's Cavern (www.platoscavern.com)

Insider Insight: *Wheel of Fortune* is already a fun game, but this one has different puzzles that are here to provide fun for the whole family! The puzzles overall tend to be a little bit easier to figure out than the ones in the original version, but that doesn't make the game any less fun. Even seasoned players can enjoy the variety this one adds if you get a little burned out on the puzzles in the standard version. I tend to go back and forth between this one and the standard edition just to keep things fresh and avoid seeing repeated puzzles. This is another great NES offering for gamers and non-gamers alike. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wheel of Fortune: Featuring Vanna White

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: David Wiebenson/Imagitec Design.
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

This game plays like the other NES versions of *Wheel of Fortune*, but is enhanced by the endorsement of the lovely Vanna White, who appears via a static close-up shot during the intro. During gameplay the longtime *WOF* veteran turns letters (duh). Players can now select from different characters, as opposed to simply entering their names. They appear in a row of three before an angled wheel positioned below them. Unfortunately you can see only the current value the arrow is on as the wheel spins. (In the other versions no contestants are shown but the wheel is flat and you can see all the monetary values on the wheel as it spins.) There are more than 2,000 questions spread between 10 categories: person, people, phrase, place, event, title, thing, things, fictional person, and same name. Unlike the other three NES *WOF* games, this one features an updating of the bonus round to correspond with the TV show's changed rules. This is the hardest to find of the four versions, but it's not rare.

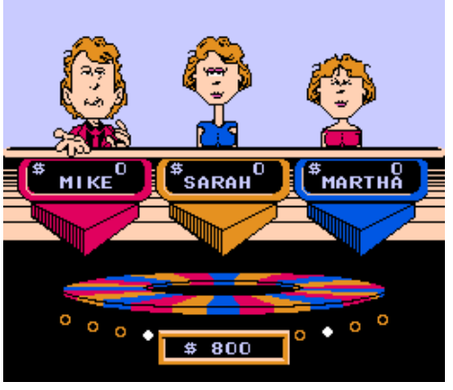
Notable Quotable:

"If you are only going to own one version of this game show (and why would you want more?) then this is the one to get. You get more puzzles per game, you can decline puzzles that you have already had, and it is the most recent incarnation of the game show available on the NES. Obviously if you aren't a fan of the game show then don't bother." —NES Archives (formerly at www.nesarchives.com)

Notable Quotable:

"From the introduction you see a higher quality image of Vanna White . . . it looks much better than the image shown on the DOS version . . . the wheel on this game changes just like on the DOS version and the TV show itself! Because of the change and increases in values expect high scores—money amounts—which makes playing and beating your opponent much more challenging . . . The characters and their reactions are hilarious." —Shosostros! (showsotros.com)

Insider Insight: Despite being published by the same company as the other NES versions of *WOF* this one is my least favorite. Sure, there are a lot of the same mechanics—at its core it's the same game, but it seems that the developers wanted to change everything else about it. You can now choose a character portrait, but they're all unappealing, over-exaggerated cartoon drawings—I don't want to be any of these people. There're some other issues I have with this game, like how slow Vanna walks to turn the letters and how the puzzle only displays while you're actively choosing your letters. These may be nitpicks, but hey, try it for yourself and you be the judge. If this is the only *Wheel of Fortune* game you've played I'm sure it's just fine, but it won't likely take long playing any other version of the game to see the difference in quality. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wheel of Fortune: Junior Edition

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.

Another variation on the 8-bit video game version of the popular TV game show, *Wheel of Fortune: Junior Edition* looks and plays virtually identical to the original NES *Wheel of Fortune*, but the word puzzles are geared toward younger players (the cartridge is recommended for gamers ages seven and up). Two additional categories are included: things (note the plural usage) and fictional person, but there are still just a little over 1,000 puzzles. Answers range from Abominable Snowman, to Chicken McNuggets, to Luke Skywalker, to Zip Code. As in the other versions of the game prizes are awarded to the victor. Here you can win such items as a BMX bike, a TV and VCR (video cassette recorder for you youngsters), a stereo system, a trip to Disney World, or a $1,000 toy token.

Notable Quotable:

"One might think the puzzles would be easier, or that the answers should have more to do with kid stuff, like toys or television shows. Only a few of them lean in that direction; others, like the curious 'Ash Wednesday' solution, wouldn't usually be on a kid's radar." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

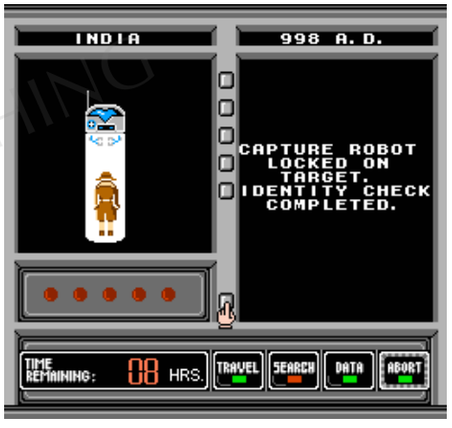
"The description on the back is missing a punctuation (a period), and the credits screen shown the moment you boot the game up misspelled the word 'pictures' and was written 'picures.' Luckily none of the puzzles I needed to guess and solve were misspelled . . . getting a 7-year-old kid to guess 'Third Base Umpire' or 'Toasted Marshmallow' proves this may not be too forgiving for kids . . . What I found odd was that level 1 in difficulty is actually the toughest and level 3 is the easiest . . . it is an okay edition." —Shosostros! (showsotros.com)

Insider Insight: *Wheel of Fortune: Junior Edition* is just as much fun as *Wheel of Fortune* and *Wheel of Fortune: Family Edition*. Some of the pop culture references are outdated so kids today may struggle with some of the answers, despite the "Junior" in the title. Even I've found myself stumped on occasion until the puzzle is solved and I'm still left confused. Regardless, there are enough answerable puzzles to keep the game enjoyable and somewhat relevant. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

OSPREY PUBLISHING

Where in Time Is Carmen Sandiego?

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Distinctive Software.
GAME TYPE: Educational/History/First-Person Graphic Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



Where in Time Is Carmen Sandiego? is based on the 1989 Broderbund edutainment computer game that spawned a PBS game show. You travel through time via a Chronoskimmer 325i to collect the clues and warrants necessary to capture and arrest Carmen Sandiego and her henchmen, who have stolen historical artifacts. To determine the crooks' whereabouts, you interview eyewitnesses and informants and use a scanner to locate objects. To obtain arrest warrants, you use clues detailing the crooks' interests and physical attributes. You'll track down 16 time-looting villains who have made off with such valuables as Paul Revere's horse, the Eiffel Tower, and Queen Elizabeth's tea set. The left half of the screen shows the various locales, characters, and objects, while the right half shows the point-and-click menus and other text (including educational info on historical figures). The game was originally packaged with a paperback edition of the *New American Desk Encyclopedia*.

Notable Quotable:

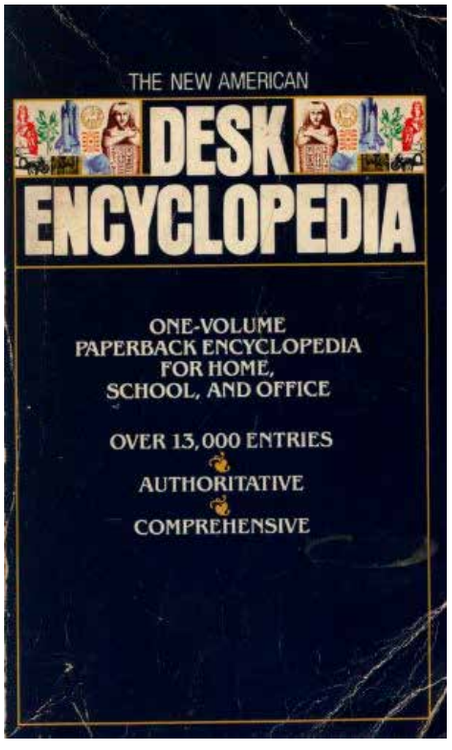
"This title is a blast from the computer world of stardom. On the Nintendo it comes off very well and offers a very interesting and sometimes educational quest for players. The music isn't the best . . . but the gameplay is easy to follow and fun." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"There's no action, little music, and minimal animation, but due to the genre this can be forgiven. Besides flat facts the text uses uncommon wording like 'titian' hair or 'Caribbean' eyes, demanding serviceable literacy. Even if you understand the clues it's still tricky spending your hours wisely. Adults will have a much easier time than kids, but it's still challenging and fun." —Karen Niemla (2016, *Ultimate Nintendo: Guide to the NES Library (1985-1995)*)

Notable Quotable:

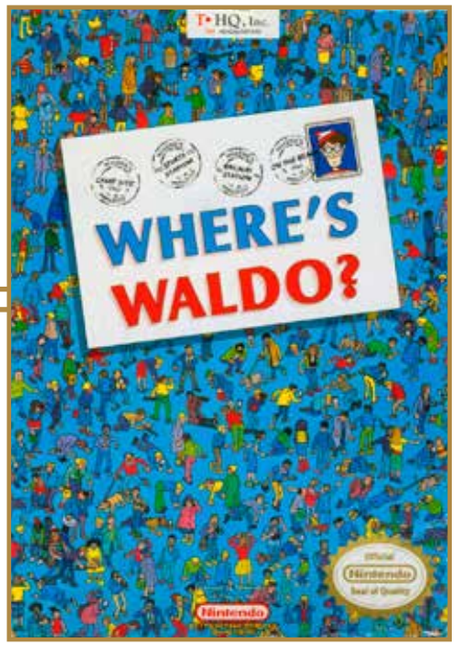
"With 80-plus cases to solve you'll be sleuthing for an age to catch Ms. Sandiego (thankfully the game gives you a password after you solve every case). I could see the formula—gather clues, travel, gather clues, travel, issue a warrant, arrest, repeat—growing stale after a couple dozen cases. Still, few games have embodied the edutainment genre so well. With *Where in Time*, you will learn, and you will enjoy yourself . . . within reason." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Where's Waldo?

PUBLISHER: THQ Software.
DEVELOPER: Bethesda Softworks.
GAME TYPE: Educational/General, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



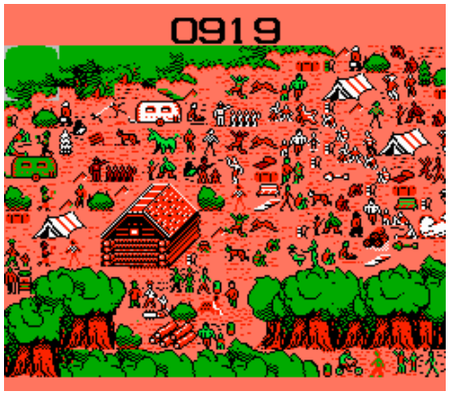
Adapted from the popular children's puzzle book series created by English illustrator Martin Handford in 1987, *Where's Waldo?* is divided into four modes of play. Search the Scene for Waldo is conventional in nature, as players try to spot the miniaturized, bespectacled kid in five busy scenes: Train Station, Forest, Fairground, City, and Castle. The Cave Search has players using a flashlight to look for Waldo, while The Subway Search is a hunt for Waldo's glasses within a maze of octagons. Finally, The Moon Match-Up is a slot machine type of game where players spin rows of historical characters and Waldo himself. A poor fit for the NES, *Where's Waldo?* suffers from dull gameplay and lousy graphics that make it hard to find the title character. You can find the entry for *The Great Waldo Search* in *The NES Omnibus: The Nintendo Entertainment System and Its Games, Volume 1 (A–L)*.

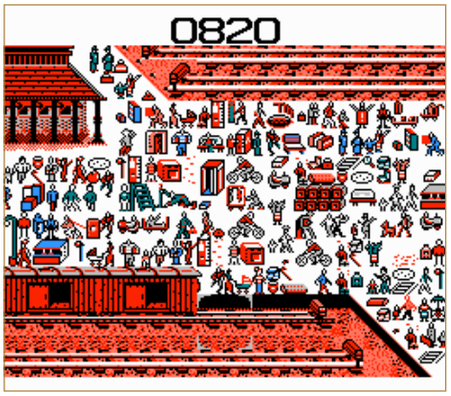
Notable Quotable:
"This game is a biblical plague that poisons everything it touches with nonexistent gameplay and terrible graphics. Don't cut it any slack because it's supposed to be an 'educational' game; the only thing *Where's Waldo* will teach anyone is how to stop loving." —*Game Informer* (January 2006)

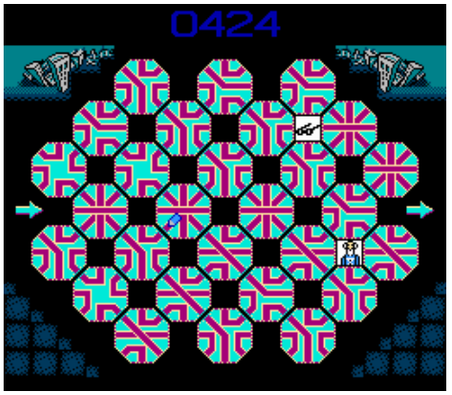
Notable Quotable:
"8-bit Hell. It's a game so fundamentally flawed and aesthetically unpleasing that it has to rank as one of the worst video games of all time . . . The books were a lot of fun, but they don't exactly scream to be translated into video game form . . . title screen features some of the most wretched, ear piercing, headache inducing 'music' in video game history." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

Notable Quotable:
"This could have been a decent game. The overall idea sounds somewhat fun until you see how poor the graphics are . . . the subway level is kind of fun. It is cool that Waldo has many different spots that he can appear on for each level so you can't just memorize where he will be . . . The graphics are so splotchy in this game that sometimes I will click on someone who looks nothing like Waldo, only to discover that he is Waldo, which is a major problem. Another problem is that Waldo doesn't always wear his standard red-and-white striped shirt. In the forest Waldo wears dark clothes, and in the city he is often in a car or popping out of a hole, where you can't even see his body at all." —NES Archives (formerly at nesarchives.com)

Insider Insight: When I first played *Where's Waldo?* I thought something was wrong with my TV. The problem was with how you had to search for Waldo within these huge 8-bit murals that looked like pixelated messes. There was no way you could find anything that remotely resembled Waldo in the graphically limited scenes. Most of the time I had to guess where Waldo was—usually behind some cluster of gobbledygook pixels clumped closely together. I bought the cartridge at a garage sale in 2001, back when you could still find NES games at garage sales pretty easily. After going home to play it I was so tempted to drive back over there and ask them why they bought it. I only spent a dollar on the game and still felt ripped off!
—Chris Bores, The Irate Gamer on YouTube



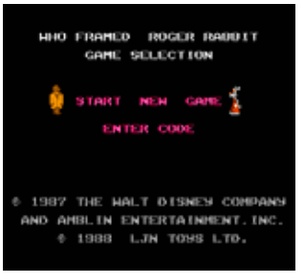




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Who Framed Roger Rabbit

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Action/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.



Based on the 1988 feature film, which melded animation with live action, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* is a mystery adventure in which players assume the role of Eddie Valiant (played by Bob Hoskins in the movie), a human detective who must search four sections of 1940s Greater Los Angeles—Downtown L.A., the City Park, the Warehouse District, and ToonTown—for clues to prove Roger Rabbit's innocence, with Roger tagging along (unfortunately there is no two-player mode, even though it seems like there should be). This involves exploring caves and woods, searching buildings and rooms, questioning passersby, and using a variety of items to proceed through the game and to battle or distract snakes, dogs, weasels, and other enemies. For example, you can throw a crowbar to break the lock on a door and place an exploding cigar to thwart a Toon or human. Other items you can use include a brick, fist, baseball, fishbone, spring shoes, dynamite, bomb, rose, portable hole, wallet, whistle, six-shooter, and glove. The game features two viewpoints: overhead map screen, where you can hitch a ride with Benny the Cab; and close-up side view, where the action takes place. (You can find clues and objects in both areas.) You'll also meet up with such characters from the film as Jessica Rabbit, Baby Herman, and the bouncer gorilla.

Memories: I've always been a fan of good animation, and I'm intrigued by the mix of animation and live action, so I was super stoked for *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, which I saw in theaters upon release. I sat mesmerized as Daffy Duck and Donald Duck shared screen time and Betty Boop appeared in all her black-and-white glory. Great stuff. I even wore a Roger Rabbit T-shirt while I met the hysterical hare himself (or at least someone dressed in a Roger Rabbit costume) at Disney World back in the day. To say I was disappointed by the NES game is a drastic understatement. I would have far preferred a no-nonsense yet creatively designed platformer like *Felix the Cat* instead of this difficult adventure.

Notable Quotable:
"Eddie kind of throws his punch in an upward arc, and to hit anything you have to stand at exactly the right angle and be practically on top of what you're trying to hit. It's infuriatingly precise . . . unforgivingly cryptic . . . makes a mockery of its license, and its developer. The music can be kind of fun . . . unfair deaths, ugly visuals, useless attack and sidekick, awful driving controls." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

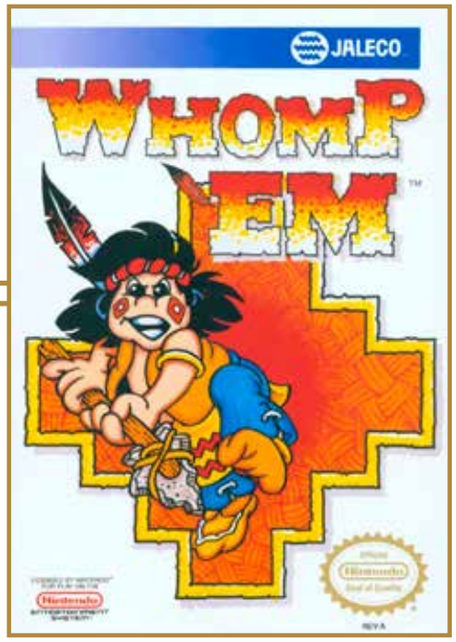
Notable Quotable:
"Much of the charm in the film came from its atmosphere, recreated here to the best of the NES's capability, and from the cameos by classic animated characters like Bugs Bunny, Mickey Mouse, Betty Boop, and dozens of others . . . it would've cost far too much to have Bugs or Mickey show up. Instead the NPCs are generic humans who have nothing interesting to say. But hey, at least you can punch them . . . truly defined 'Nintendo Hard'; from its opening moments you might reach for a wallet outside your office and get beaned on the noggin by a falling flower pot, cracking your skull. You may step outside and quickly get hit by a car . . . exploration in the game is actually sort of fun for its time; even though the buildings are pretty much the same and searching through them is incredibly tedious (and time consuming), finding a special location like the Ink & Paint Club gives a bit of a thrill, and when you finally gain access to Toontown it's exciting to see something different." —Dashing Nerds (dashingnerds.com)

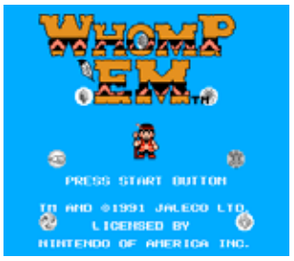
Insider Insight: *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* wasn't just one of my favorite movies of all time, it was one of my favorite NES games (at least for a while). The open world exploration let players immerse themselves into the 1988 blockbuster in ways that were uncharacteristic of third party developed movie licensed video games. You could tell that Rare understood the appeal of Roger Rabbit and his 1940s film noir meets classic Golden Age cartoon world. In fact, the game was so faithful to the film my cousins and I actually watched the ending fight with Judge Doom on our VHS copy of the movie to help us get a clue as to how to defeat him in the game . . . that's LOONEY! —Tyler Esposito, creator and host of *My Retro Life* (as seen on Amazon Prime and YouTube)

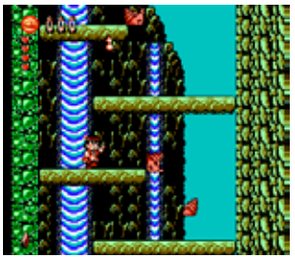
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Whomp 'Em

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Jaleco.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.







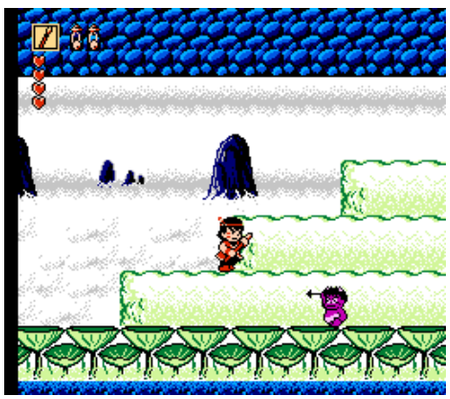
Whomp 'Em puts you in the role of Soaring Eagle, a young Indian Brave obsessed with seeking totems for his magic pouch. To acquire the totems you'll travel through eight worlds, the first being a game tutorial. The next six can be traversed in any order, while level eight remains a mystery (no spoilers here). Known worlds include Sacred Woods, Magic Forest, Water Test, Secret Cliff, Ice Ritual, and Fire Test. As you run and jump through the game spikes, fire spouts, dropping ice, moving platforms, and other obstacles will make your travels perilous, as will such creatures as hopping mushrooms, twirling monsters, rolling eyeballs, and grabbing hands. To repel the petulant pests you are equipped with a spear for attacking forward, up, and down. When defeated, some enemies will drop such magic items as a flint spearhead, buffalo headdress, gourd, or deerskin shirt. These items can increase your attack strength, lengthen your spear, heal your wounds, give an extra life, increase your defensive power or life force, or make you invincible. When you defeat the demon boss at the end of each level you are awarded a totem. These totems can be special weapons or powers, such as a fire wand that shoots a flame, an ice crystal that freezes enemies, or a web allowing you to catch enemies. You can collect totems and select from them as needed, but they will drain your life force with each use. The action scrolls vertically as well as horizontally. Although *Whomp 'Em* is not as well known as *Mega Man* or *Castlevania*, fans of those games will probably enjoy the action—this is a solid platformer. The original Japanese Famicom game was inspired by the ancient Chinese novel *Journey to the West* and had a different protagonist.

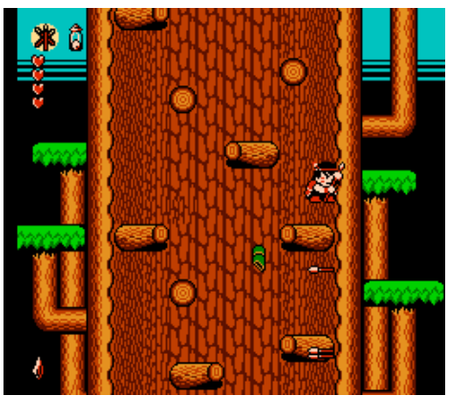
Memories: Cartoonish, parodic depictions of Native Americans are rather cringey in today's more racially sensitive environment, but in the early '90s many of us didn't really think of *Whomp 'Em* in those terms. We just saw the game as a playable cartoon of sorts with a goofy name.

Notable Quotable:
"An interesting game . . . The graphics were colorful and the sound was appropriate. I also liked the ability to visit any of the stages at any time. Good game!" —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"It's easy to criticize games like *Whomp 'Em* on the basis of originality . . . But there's a lot to be said for a product that's well-produced. The graphics are clean and colorful, the play control is flawless and immediately accessible, and it's addicting enough to keep me going until all my 'continues' are used up." —*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (May 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"I loved the big characters when compared to other games like *Mega Man*. The enemies [are] very generic looking . . . Sound effects were nothing special but did set the mood. Gameplay and control are quite responsive . . . While enemies respawn regularly like in most NES games you can continue to kill them for health power-ups." —RetroGame Man (retrogameman.com)

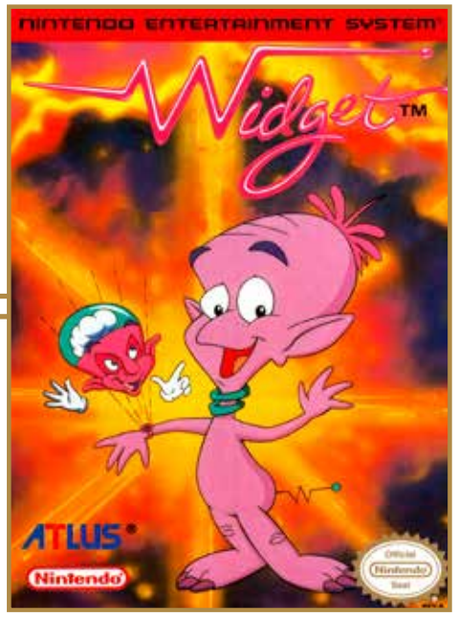


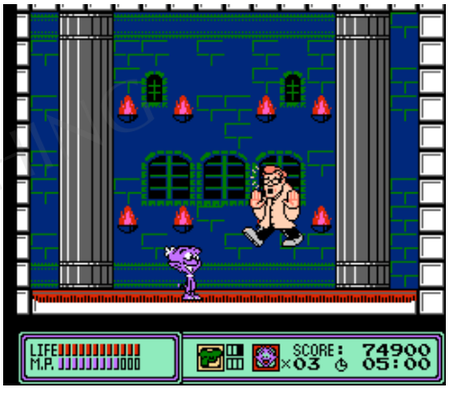


©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Widget

PUBLISHER: Atlus.
DEVELOPER: Graphic Research.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.





Based on the environmentally themed cartoon series that ran from 1990 to 1992, *Widget* puts gamers in the titular role of a big-headed, 4-foot-tall, purple alien who is dedicated to protecting all living creatures on Earth. Gameplay evokes *Mega Man* (but is easier), with players walking along, jumping on platforms, and shooting snakes, bats, bears, pigs, hawks, and other creatures with large round bullets. To make it past certain areas, Widget can transform into the following: a Cannon for executing powerful attacks, a Mouse for crawling through tight areas, a Rock Man for punching through certain obstacles, a Bird Man for flying, and a Dolphin for swimming. Grabbing various items improves the speed and power of Widget's firing mechanism. When he's stuck in an area where he cannot go on or transform, he can use the Mega Brain to escape to a stage to get an item he needs. Be advised that there are fake walls that look like normal walls, so you should check as you go for secret openings.

Notable Quotable:

"It's cute and colorful, and filled with many enemies to shoot at and platforms to jump across . . . super crappy version of *Mega Man*'s Buster Gun . . . excellent job of utilizing each form to make your way through the game . . . refreshing change of pace . . . encourages you to go back to previous stages to find power-ups that you couldn't reach before using your newfound abilities. It's a really neat touch and would make *Widget* a decently fun game if it wasn't for the fact that playing the game is mostly maddening . . . controls incredibly stiff . . . filled with leaps of faith . . . cheap hits . . . isn't a very fun game to play." —Retrovania.net (YouTube)

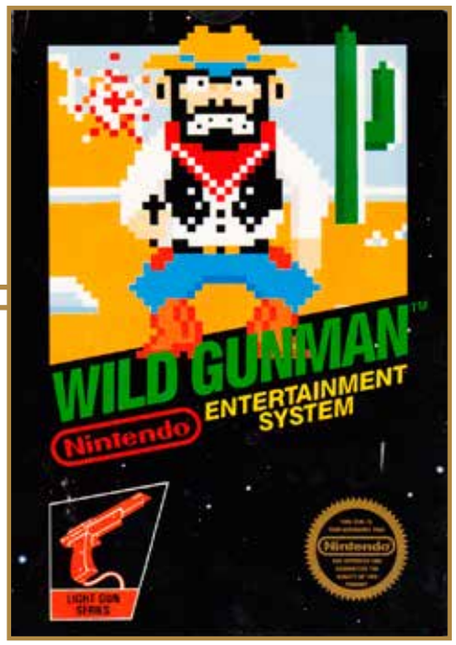
Notable Quotable:

"Despite the show *Widget* having received approval from the National Education Association, the official video game adaptation has zero pretenses of serving as an educational tool. Although the pro-environmentalism messages persist in the opening of each stage they are completely in the background. Given the radically varying quality of educational games this change was for the best. What the adaptation strives to be instead is an unapologetically fun experience. It is therefore a true shame that Graphic Research completely and utterly failed to achieve this goal . . . In light of its hideously broken coding, hostile design choices, bad controls, and short length, *Widget* has nothing practical going for it. The game's only redeeming quality would be its decent music." —Extra Life (extralifereviews.com)

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wild Gunman

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1 / Intelligent Systems.
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1985.



A classic Black Box title, *Wild Gunman* is a fun, simple, Old West–style shootout where you take hold of the Zapper light gun and fire at characters on the screen. In the first mode of play you face a single gunman who draws his gun and says "fire." To honor the code of the Wild West you must wait until the gunman draws before you fire your gun. The second mode is similar to the first, but with two onscreen gunmen, and you should shoot only the one that says "fire." The third and final mode is similar to *Hogan's Alley*, with you firing away at outlaws that pop up in windows and in the doorways of buildings. In this mode you have 15 bullets and must beat 10 gunmen to clear a wave. Inspired by Nintendo's 1974 electromechanical arcade game of the same name created by Gunpei Yokoi.

Memories: The Famicom version of *Wild Gunman* was offered in a version that included a western-style revolver gun you could use instead of the Zapper. It's a bummer we didn't get this edition in the US—I love games in oversized boxes packaged with something extra.

Notable Quotable:

"Despite its repetitious nature, it's one of my favorites . . . It would have been better if the game action was more varied—gunmen on horses, for instance." —*Computer and Video Games* (September 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"Those who enjoy using the Zapper will find *Wild Gunman* a delight. It's easy to learn, full of fun, designed with good animation and sound, and absolutely addictive. The cartridge offers something for everyone in the family, from very young gamers with limited abilities to experienced hands with well-honed arcade skills." —*Computer Entertainer* (April 1986)

Notable Quotable:

"The two bad guys usually have different shot times so you need to make sure you shoot them in the correct order based on their reaction speeds. However, the game occasionally throws a curve ball and staggers the moments when you're allowed to fire at each of them. This helps to keep you engaged and makes for an enjoyable experience . . . The graphics are fantastic for an early NES game, with large character sprites and comical animations . . . a well-made game and a great introduction to the NES Zapper. The modes are short, with little variety, but there's just enough here to hold your interest for a while." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Insider Insight: The NES has the greatest light gun game selection of any console, even after more than 35 years, and *Wild Gunman* is one of the best in the genre. I didn't play it until 1990 or so, but I was familiar with the game because of its appearance in the film *Back to the Future II* (funny enough the game is now several years older than it would have been in the movie's imagined future).

The first time I played *Wild Gunman* was shortly after our family had moved to a new town, while I was hanging out with some kids in our new neighborhood for the first time. We spent an entire afternoon at one of their houses playing nothing but Zapper games, namely *Duck Hunt*, *Hogan's Alley*, and, of course, *Wild Gunman*. I had a lot of fun that day, and I was glad to have made new friends in the neighborhood so soon. I still play *Wild Gunman* regularly, and even though it's only a single-player title, I think of it as a social gaming experience because of how I was introduced to the game.

I love how *Wild Gunman* mixes the drama of a wild west shoot out with just the right amount of humor, especially in the animations of the gunfighters who conspicuously resemble Looney Tunes characters. The more one plays the game, though, the more obvious it becomes that the real enemy is the clock, supposedly timing your trigger finger down to the thousandths of a second (there's likely some "smoke and mirrors" involved). The cartridge used the same chipset as *Punch Out!!* to enable the extra large character sprites and it was one of the earliest NES games to feature voice sampling. Use of Chopin's famous funeral march when the player failed was a hilarious touch that only paid further homage to classic cartoons. — Kale Menges, artist and game developer

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Willow

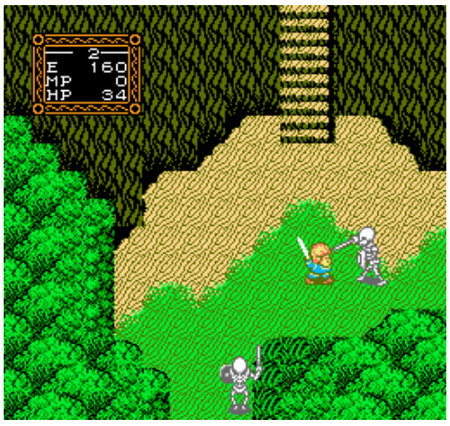
PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1989.

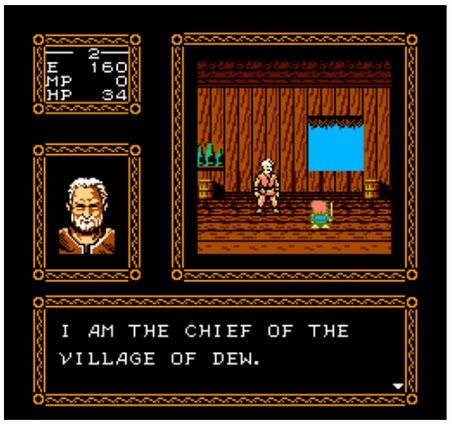
Players control little person Willow Ufgood, who must save the world from the dark magic of Bavmorda. Gameplay is similar to *The Legend of Zelda*—complete with top-down view and real time battles—but is more of a pure role playing game. As Willow explores the vast areas, talking to people and using magic spells and a variety of swords to kill bats, bees, ghosts, zombies, blobs, trolls, skeleton knights, and other enemies, he will gain points in experience, magic, and health. Swords have different weights, and some will be too heavy for Willow until he gets more practice. At first Willow's jabbing, slashing sword swings slowly, but it gets faster with experience points gained. He wields shields as well. Based on the 1988 fantasy film, which was directed by Ron Howard and featured Warwick Davis in the title role, *Willow* also features such characters from the movie as Madmartigan, Sorsha, the Brownies, Fin Raziel, and General Kael, who acts as a boss.

Notable Quotable:
"I will admit that I liked the movie a lot more than I liked the game, but I still found *Willow* to be an enjoyable little time waster. It was a well-made game with very few signs of being rushed, and I felt a good deal of satisfaction when I beat the final boss into oblivion." —RPG Fan (www.rpgfan.com)

Notable Quotable:
"I said it then and I'll say it now. The NES *Willow* game is better than George Lucas' movie. In fact, I liked *Willow* so much that I'd put it up there on my top list of NES RPG favorites with games like *Dragon Warrior*, *Final Fantasy*, and *Crystalis*. Don't let the title or the source material fool you—this game will grab you right from the start and won't let go." —Jeremy Dunham (www.ign.com), IGN Games Editorial Manager

Notable Quotable:
"Sounds and graphics are state of the art. The music, particularly the eerie tunes played in the caves, heightens the game's suspense, and changes often enough to keep from being monotonous. And the sound effects—the little explosions and the clang of swords against metal—are fantastic . . . the underground caves are stunning. Strolling around the surface of *Willow*'s world is equally exciting; you can almost count the leaves on the trees . . . *Willow*'s outstanding graphics, captivating music, and difficult—but not impossible—tasks combine to make it a delightful game for players of all ages." —*The Big Book of Nintendo Games* (Compute Books, 1991)





Insider Insight: I missed the boat on *The Legend of Zelda*. By the time I upgraded to an NES *Zelda II* was the hot new game. But as the years wore on I became a big fan of *Zelda* clones. And while it's safe to say *Crystalis* was the best of these, *Willow* is my favorite.

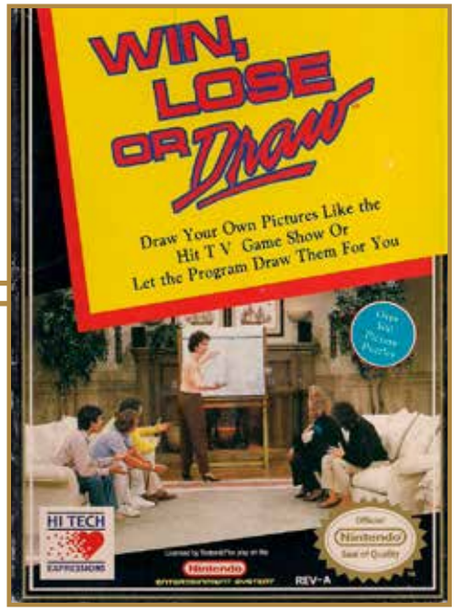
When *Willow* hit the market I would play anything that said Capcom on the box, and the company didn't let me down with the game. I wasn't sure what to expect at first, but I immediately fell in love with the unique graphical style and catchy soundtrack. *Willow* scratched that action/RPG itch I suffered from.

Sure, it's an extremely loose retelling of the story from the film. In fact, it differs so much that I long assumed it was a completely different game in Japan that had simply been redressed with the *Willow* license when it came to North America. But it didn't bother me too much—the odd appearance by characters like Madmartigan and Fin Raziel was enough to satisfy. —Greg Sewart, game developer, former Previews and Reviews Editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Win, Lose or Draw

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: RSP.
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1–6 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



One of several game show adaptations for the NES, *Win, Lose or Draw* features two teams competing to guess what is being drawn on screen, either by the computer or by a player. The quicker a player guesses the right answer the more points he or she will earn. The computer draws expertly, but gamers may have a hard time guessing what other players are drawing since using the controller is less than smooth. Options include male and female teammates, a Practice mode, three difficulty levels, and a handy password feature that helps prevent repetitious answers, which include such varied things as Tablets, Ladder, Fingers, Ribbon, Pants, and Hatchet. Based on the popular TV program that aired from 1987 to 1990, *Win, Lose or Draw* is similar to the board game *Pictionary*, which was published in 1985.

Notable Quotable:

"It's not ideal for drawing, particularly when the game asks you to draw round objects . . . there's nothing from stopping the players from helping each other out or cheating by looking at the answer ahead of time . . . Sadly this is a game that is easy to imagine could work on more recent hardware . . . the very concept of *Win, Lose or Draw* is decent enough fun . . . The NES was just too limited to accurately capture the idea behind the game show." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Some of the more confusing drawings actually made the game more fun. It gets boring quick when you identify the picture within seconds, but the confusing ones let you laugh at the bad drawing just like you would if you were playing with a friend who can't draw well . . . I played around with the practice drawing . . . It was actually fairly responsive . . . a very fun game. Not something you would get addicted to and play every day, but something you would pop in every now and then for a quick laugh." —DeadPark (www.deadpark.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphically speaking the game isn't very impressive at all . . . The characters look like they were based on drawings by an elementary school child, yet I will say that I found them oddly charming. And while the music was repetitive, I kind of liked it . . . It's really not that great . . . The game just doesn't translate that well to the NES. Sometimes the computer's drawings are really hard to figure out . . . you have to slowly type on a keyboard that doesn't even let you wrap around the board from one side to the other . . . drawing with the NES controller is just too difficult to do quickly in a multiplayer game." —The No Swear Gamer (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"It looks nothing like the drawing boards used on the show. It's an Etch-A-Sketch, for all intents and purposes . . . If you don't want to draw things yourself you can always get the computer to be the artist. Unfortunately this makes it even less fun . . . the computer artist is just too good. After playing about 15 rounds on the most difficult setting there were only two that I couldn't guess right away . . . possibly the worst video game music I've ever heard . . . they actually replicate the horrible 'winning siren' also used in *MTV's Remote Control*." —Christopher Michael Baker (formerly at allgame.com)

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Winter Games

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Atelier Double.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Olympics, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.

Based on the 1985 Commodore 64 computer game, *Winter Games* has just four events, compared to six in the C64 game and eight in various other computer versions. Said events include Hot Dog Aerials (ski jumping with flips and stunts), Speed Skating (side-view/split-screen racing against the computer or an opponent), Figure Skating (arena ice skating with various jumps and spins), and Bobsled (negotiating twists and turns while sledding down a mountain). This is a disappointing port not only because of the missing events, but also thanks to poor controls (especially in Figure Skating), lousy graphics (including monocolored contestants), primitive sounds, and the lack of an eight-player mode, which did show up in the superior Atari 7800 version. For those of you keeping score at home, the Atari 2600 rendition has seven events.

Notable Quotable:

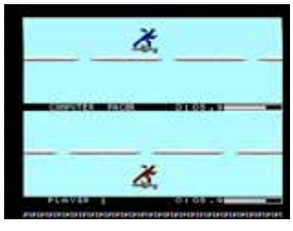
"While the game looks great and has very good music and sound effects, we would have been happier to see another event or two . . . The simulations of these winter sporting events are very well done." —*Computer Entertainer* (November 1987)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics and sounds are less than average. The backgrounds look very plain in all the events and the sprites are pretty small, with choppy and stiff animation, especially in the Figure Skating event. The music is unmemorable, and the sounds consist of a lot of beeps that get annoying very quickly . . . Acclaim could have done a much better job bringing *Winter Games* to the NES, as evidenced by Milton Bradley's ports of *California Games* and *World Games* . . . a stripped down version of the Commodore 64 hit that just pales in comparison." —Adam King (www.nestimes.net)

Notable Quotable:

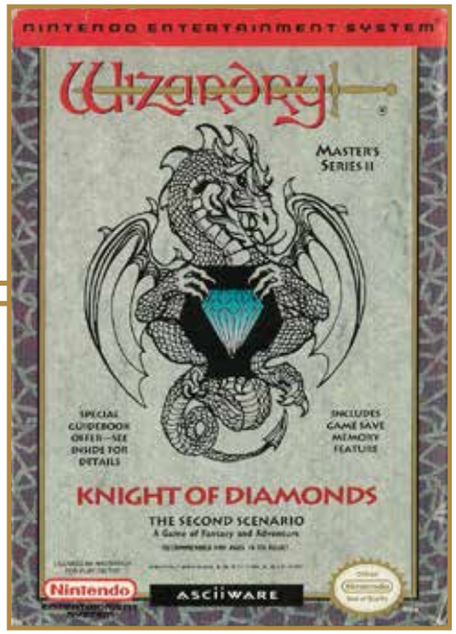
"I've played some great versions of *Winter Games* on other consoles (like the Atari 7800), but this NES edition is a complete flop . . . uninspired opening ceremony . . . you begin with the hot dog competition. The idea here is to jump off a ramp on skis and perform tricks in mid-air. Unfortunately you're only in the air for a split second so there's not much time to get creative . . . unresponsive controls . . . jerky animation . . . Unceremoniously ends by returning you to the main menu, without even bothering to mention who won. The best thing about *Winter Games* is that it's over so quickly . . . a halfhearted translation of what should have been a quality game." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wizardry—Knight of Diamonds: The Second Scenario

PUBLISHER: ASCII Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Sir-Tech Software.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



The sequel to *Wizardry—Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord*, *Knight of Diamonds* offers the same type of text-initiated, turn-based battles and dungeon-crawling action. The mission this time around is to retrieve the lost staff of Gilda, which is needed for projecting a protective force field over the City of Llylgamyn. You'll be making selections from text menus (equip, trade, use, drop, fight, parry, run, and the like), creating a party of six adventurers (fighters, magic users, and a thief), exploring a labyrinthine six-floor dungeon (mapping the quest on 20×20 graph paper is recommended), searching for treasure chests, killing monsters to gain experience points, and much more, including buying weapons and armor at Boltac's Trading Post. You can create up to 20 good, neutral, and/or evil characters (races include humans, dwarves, elves, gnomes, and hobbits), but only six can join the party. Based on the popular 1982 computer game.

Notable Quotable:

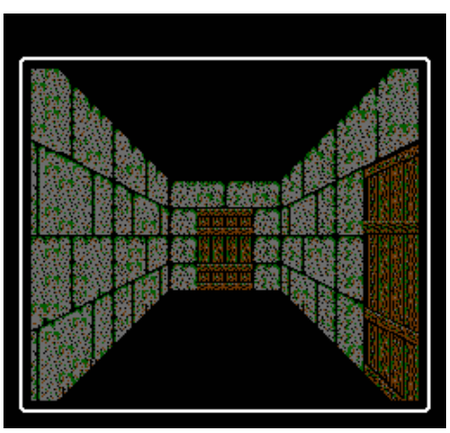
"*Knight of Diamonds* plays better than the first NES game because of the advances in graphics and improvements in interface since then. The level of difficulty makes this only for the serious adventurer, but well worth the effort." —*Electronic Games* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"As far as true role playing value goes *Wizardry II* comes through with flying colors in some areas, but falls short of the mark in others . . . there are some cryptic messages and mind-crunching riddles in the maze to whet your adventure appetite . . . You learn very little about the semi-intriguing township of Llylgamyn, and none of the inhabitants seem to be in a talkative mood . . . the graphics and music are flat-out dull. Instead of animated combat sequences you just see a still picture of your adversary. The tunes, too, get repetitive." —*GamePro* (December 1991)

Notable Quotable:

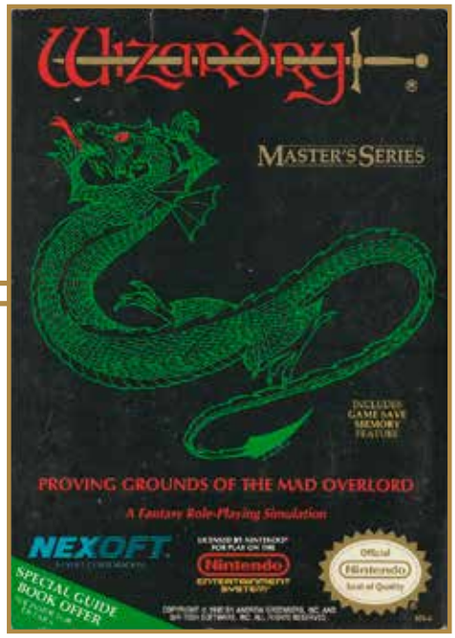
"The lack of a save import function for *Knight of Diamonds* on the NES forced ASCII to create an almost entirely different game. The basic dungeon layout and the quest remain, but instead of forcing players through the pain of getting their party up to snuff (although grinding is still a major element), all monsters and traps have been rebalanced. Rather than a mere 'grind till you're up to beat the next armor piece, rinse, repeat,' there is now a number of little puzzles and fetch quests involved in getting there. This sometimes even involves doing errands for monsters and other—mostly automatic—interactions. This makes the console versions feel more alive and interesting than any of the other ones." —Sam Derboo (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wizardry—Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord

PUBLISHER: Nexoft.
DEVELOPER: Sir-Tech Software.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.



Wizardry—Proving Grounds invites players to assemble a party of six characters from the following classes: fighters, thieves, clerics, wizards, humans, elves, bishops, mages, dwarves, hobbits, and gnomes. The objective is to retrieve an amulet stolen by the Great Wizard Werdna, which involves the following: exploring mazelike dungeons (depicted by brick walls); purchasing armor, magic, and weapons (swords, shields, daggers, and the like); initiating turn-based battles with monsters to gain experience points; finding secret doors and trapped treasure chests; avoiding pitfalls, traps, and other obstacles; and much more. The graphics are sparse (there's lots of text and a few still shots, but no animation), and it is recommended that players map out their adventure using 20×20 graph paper. Based on the groundbreaking, highly influential 1981 Apple II classic that helped bring the notion of pencil-and-paper-style RPGs to home computers.

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

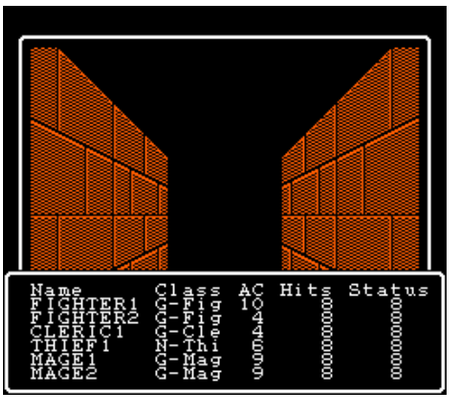
"Boring!! While the computer version might have been a hit and spawned five sequels, the NES version is a repetitive session of mazes and monsters . . . Banging your head into walls is more fun. It's too hard and too complex." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1990)

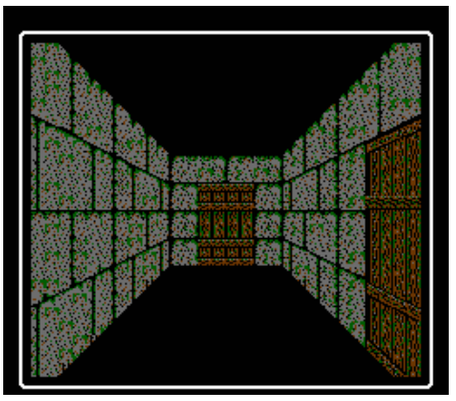
Notable Quotable:

"*Wizardry* might be a pretty primitive game by today's standards, but it still delivers the goods. While it's a pretty simplistic dungeon crawler on the surface, this game's engine delivers a surprising amount of depth, giving it a decent amount of replay value. I'd look at this game as an enduring classic if there was some real purpose to more than half the dungeon, but it's still a pretty fun game to revisit every few years." —Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

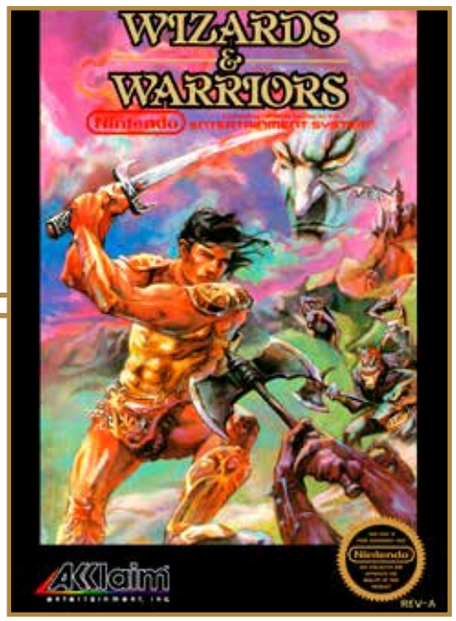
"Map making might hit some nerdy sweet spot you didn't know you had, but if you're like me, it's more of a cumbersome chore. Unlike more recent dungeon crawlers that ease you into their labyrinthine structures *Wizardry* is difficult from the get-go. Even if you buy the right armor and weapons for your characters there's a good chance one or more of your people will die in an early battle because the foes are too strong . . . One aspect that really impressed me was the smooth gameplay. It's possible to damn near run in the dungeons, and navigating between the game's many menus is seamless. Other PC-to-NES ports like *Might and Magic* or *Ultima* are almost defined by how slow they run, but *Wizardry* doesn't miss a beat." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)





Wizards & Warriors

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.



In *Wizards & Warriors* you portray Kuros, who must brave dangerous woods, spooky caves, secret tunnels, underground passageways, and Castle IronSpire to rescue the princess from the evil wizard Malkil. Kuros uses his Brightsword and other weapons, including an axe and a "dagger of throwing," to fend off skulls, ghosts, goblins, werewolves, giant insects, rock faces, skeleton changelings, vampire bats, and other enemies. There are also obstacles to avoid, including acid, lightning, bombs, and fire spouts. You'll duck under enemy arrows and bullets as well. Finding and collecting the right items is crucial in beating each level. Plenty of precise platform jumping (including diagonal jumps) is required. You'll gobble hunks of meat to replenish your health, collect valuables like gems and coins, open doors with color coded keys, fling exploding eggs to destroy every creature onscreen, grab acorns and torches to reveal bonus objects, open chests to gain weapons, don a cloak of darkness to hide from monsters, put on boots for walking over lava, and gather potions for speed, invulnerability, levitation, and higher jumping ability. *Wizards & Warriors* is a steep challenge that fans of *Actraiser* and *Ghosts 'n Goblins* should enjoy. Followed by *IronSword: Wizards & Warriors II*, which is featured in *The NES Omnibus: The Nintendo Entertainment System and Its Games Vol. 1 (A–L)*.

Notable Quotable:
"*Wizards & Warriors* refutes the claim that all video games are unrestrained target shoots. This engaging and well-programmed action quest offers a satisfying, well-rounded gaming experience." —*Computer Gaming World* (July 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"Each stage in *Wizards & Warriors* is significantly different to keep you searching and sword fighting, but levels get very tedious. It's all too easy to be knocked from your perch and fall to your doom. The graphics and sound are passable; nothing exciting. But if you've got the patience (or like an impossible challenge) you'll probably love the game." —*Zero* (April 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"*Wizards & Warriors* is a typical platform game; plenty of leaping around is needed to reach some of the more inaccessible areas. Graphically the game isn't brilliant; it's colorful, but the sprites lack detail. Sound is also a bit of a disappointment; a mediocre tune plays on the title screen but in-game sounds are limited to a few clunk, clank effects. Simple addiction but little in the long run." —*The Games Machine* (March 1990)

Insider Insight: *Wizards & Warriors* was one of my favorite childhood NES games. Ironically, though, I almost never bought it to begin with, because some friends declared the awesome looking box art (depicting a broadsword-clad warrior fiercely attacking some evil-looking bad guys) to be completely deceptive, with the real gameplay looking nothing like it and actually being pretty lame.

Granted, kids can exaggerate, but at that age it was tough to go against the grain. I certainly didn't want to seem "uncool," and with only enough money saved for one game I also couldn't afford a costly mistake. But the fantasy setting of *Wizards & Warriors* nevertheless intrigued me (I had just read *The Hobbit*) so I decided to take the plunge.

The result? My friends were certainly right about the gameplay not resembling the box art—the protagonist and enemies do indeed look different. But far from being lame, the gameplay is immensely enjoyable. *Wizards and Warriors* packs action, adventure, puzzle solving, exploration, and point scoring all into a fun and challenging quest that requires patience and practice, but ultimately is very winnable and rewarding. In my book this is a total NES classic.

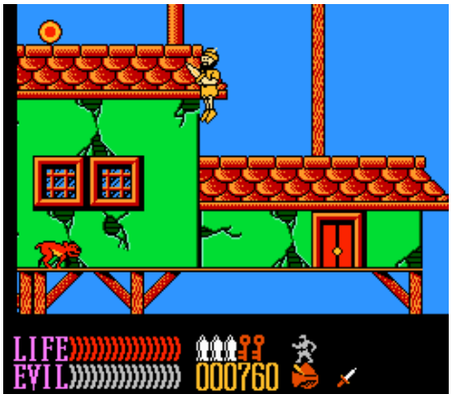
That said, the game does take some time to grasp, and I can see in hindsight how the initial learning curve might seem off-putting to some. Stick it out a little while, though, and *Wizards & Warriors* inevitably reveals its strengths.

And, if you want to see some box art that truly departs from a game's source material, try the game's first sequel, *Ironsword*, the cover of which features the male model Fabio, famous at the time for gracing the front of numerous romance novels. *Ironsword* is another fun game, but a romantic quest it most certainly is not. If you're looking to save a princess in this trilogy the original *Wizards & Warriors* is the only place you'll find her.—Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wizards & Warriors III, Kuros: Visions of Power

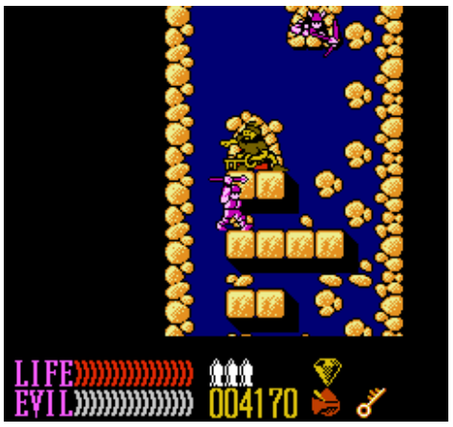
PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Zippo Games/Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



You, as Kuros, must once again battle the evil wizard Malkil, who has taken over the peaceful town of Piedup. This time around you have been robbed by a powerful bolt of lightning of your armor, memory, and honor. Regardless, you do begin the action as a knight in shining armor. In a switch from previous games in the series (*Wizards & Warriors* and *IronSword: Wizards & Warriors II*), *Wizards & Warriors III* adds something new. While hacking, slashing, creature stabbing, and perilous platforming remains, Kuros can now find statues and perform certain tasks to turn into a thief (equipped with a dagger, a crow bar, and a skeleton key), a wizard (fireballs, force field, and the ability to levitate), and a more powerful knight (long sword, throwing axe, and shooting sword). You'll also grab coins and gems for purchasing keys, food, drink, and gossip. Your overall objective, which takes you through a city, a palace, and a dungeon, sometimes in nonlinear fashion, is to overthrow Malkil and restore the throne to King James. Just prior to confronting Malkil you must defeat the Dungeon Master.

Notable Quotable:
"Sequels that don't improve on their predecessors have a history of not doing well. The graphics aren't as good as in 2, and the sounds are nothing to jam through a stereo. The gameplay is OK but doesn't keep my interest for long. RPGs with Mario-style gameplay just don't seem to make an outstanding cart." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"The first entry, *Wizards & Warriors*, is a decent game . . . despite some wonderful flourishes it still has a few flaws. Then you have the second game, *Ironsword*, which is a sentimental favorite of mine, and what I believe to be a marked improvement, with more polished music [and] graphics, less of those annoying swarm enemies, and a robust password system. But then you get to the third game and . . . what the . . . It is odd. In some ways it is an easier title than the first two *W&W* cartridges. But in other ways it's more boring, tedious, and very vanilla in its gameplay, with an emphasis on item fetching and, well, more item fetching. Sure, the transformation effects are an interesting addition, but mostly arrive as a wasted opportunity due to a lack of combat . . . not the worst game ever, but I feel little need to return to it." —Eric Bailey (nintendolegend.com)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wolverine

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1991.

When *Wolverine* hit the NES, Marvel Zombies nationwide thrilled to the notion of controlling their favorite mutant antihero. Unfortunately, thanks to a small lead character, sluggish controls, and a really stupid design element—using Wolvie's trademark claws makes him lose strength—the game was a major disappointment. Players guide the rebellious X-Man as he runs, jumps, crawls, and swims his way through nine obstacle- and trap-ridden levels, punching, kicking, and clawing ninjas, droids, zombies, and other enemies along the way. Mutant buddies Shylock, Jubilee, and Havoc provide an occasional assist. Wolvie can gobble burgers for energy and drink power potion for strength and to build up his berzerker level, which increases when defeating enemies and lowers when he is hit. When the berzerker gauge is totally red Wolverine goes berserk (and is hard to control), attacking like crazy while invincible. Levels, which according to the storyline were created by Sabretooth and his mutant terrorist friends, include The First Trial (denoted by machinery and electronics), Trial by Air, Trial by Traps (with medieval technology), Trial by Water (an underwater maze), Trial by Terror, Trial by Fire, Into the Fortress (watch out for cyclones and bazooka-toting bad guys), Defeat Magneto, and The Final Battle.

Notable Quotable:

"Wolverine makes a definite bid to join Spidey as one of the few successful comic-to-game translations, but be prepared for a challenge of heroic proportions. *Wolverine* requires precise controller moves, and in some instances when you land on a bad guy he saps all your power. Although rough play control blunts *Wolverine*'s bite, you may just find it a howling good time." —*GamePro* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:

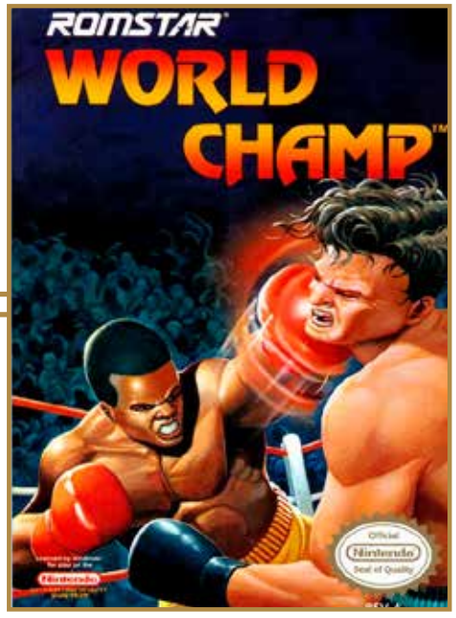
"The game seems uninspired and a simple amalgamation of levels and ideas stolen from numerous other platformers, creating something that would be generic without the lead protagonist . . . Everything carries a cartoony look, rather than an early '90s Jim Lee comic style it should have . . . the music is quite good, with high-pitched squeals attempting to imitate an electric guitar and an energetic beat in the background . . . punching makes a sound effect similar to shaking a maraca . . . Controlling this uncontrollable Canadian is somewhat sluggish; his jumping can be delayed and misjudging a hop to a platform is a common occurrence. Attacking is also rather sluggish, and attempting to jump out of water is just plain difficult." —Geoffrey Douglas Smith (formerly at allgame.com)

Insider Insight: I purchased my copy of *Wolverine* from a friend who was unloading his NES collection during the Super Nintendo era. Since Wolvie is my favorite comic book character I was super excited to play his own dedicated NES game. However, I should have taken a closer look at the box art, as I didn't initially notice that little rainbow symbol in the bottom corner. My excitement quickly transitioned to staggering disappointment realizing this was an LJN game and was further enforced by my first play attempt. If the stupidly high difficulty wasn't enough to ignite my own feral rage, the lack of faithfully portraying this beloved character was. Limiting claw use? Constantly draining health? Grabbing hamburgers bigger than your head? Come on, bub! —Zachary Gasiorowski, Editor in Chief of myGamer.com; follow on Twitter @ZackGaz

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

World Champ

PUBLISHER: Romstar.
DEVELOPER: Pixel/Visco.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Boxing, 1–8 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



In *World Champ*, the objective is to beat five ranked opponents in each division: Welterweight, Middleweight, Cruiserweight, and Heavyweight. Winning fights, including sparring in the gym, earns points to increase your boxer's speed, stamina, defense, and punch. Upgrades can be saved via password, and a special Tournament mode lets up to eight gamers square off in a bracketed tournament. You can unleash four types of punches: straight, uppercut, hook, and body blow. When your opponent throws a hook or an uppercut, you should try to block it. You can sway to dodge straight punches and body blows. A referee with a scratchy voice appears before each round and after knockdowns. Each match is five rounds, and each round is 60 seconds. The game ends when a player can't get up after 10 seconds (KO) or gets knocked down three times within a round (TKO). A decision, which occurs when neither fighter is knocked out, is a win based on accumulated points. The elevated view of the action is from the side, and the screen scrolls right and left a bit to show the entire ring.

Notable Quotable:

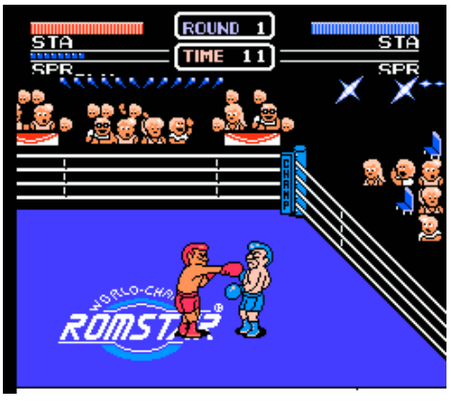
"Punching opponents and navigating the ring is smooth and effortless. I did find it easier to bob and weave around my opponent than to stop and hold B for defense . . . With 20 increasingly difficult opponents, light RPG elements, tournament modes (up to eight people passing the controller), and one-on-one versus play, *World Champ* is the second best game about punching on the NES." — Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

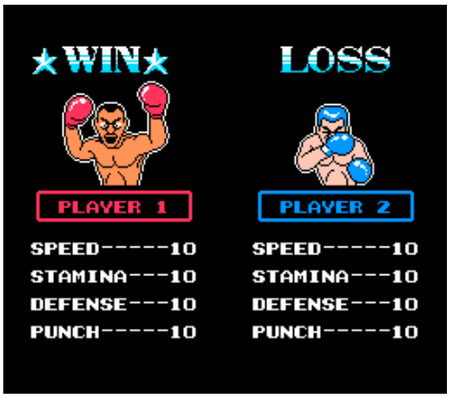
Notable Quotable:

"The music is standard fare, from your typical catchy title screen theme, to the theme that you hear when they show the boxer's stats right before the fight begins, to the hardly noticeable theme during gameplay. Digitized voice is present, as the referee makes his count when a boxer goes down or declares one person the winner by saying, 'Win!' or starting the match with a 'Fight!' The graphics and gameplay are very reminiscent of *Ring King* . . . *Ring King* had power-ups that would often appear in the ring; *World Champ* has no such perks." —World of Nintendo (www.world-of-nintendo.com)

Notable Quotable:

"A somewhat 3D experience . . . characters are boring and monotonous . . . None of them fight any differently. It's really like you're fighting the same opponent over and over again with a slightly tougher challenge each time . . . You can't choose which punch to throw. Press the A button and you'll just go completely around the horn, throwing all four punches in a random cycle . . . The graphics are up to par and the crowd is not only active, but it fills up the empty spaces that would have been there . . . The music is kind of cool, and the sound effects are adequate, but the sound quality of the ref's voice is absolutely atrocious . . . isn't exactly horrible, but it has a tendency to get boring . . . constant button mashing." — AqualungGameReviews (YouTube)

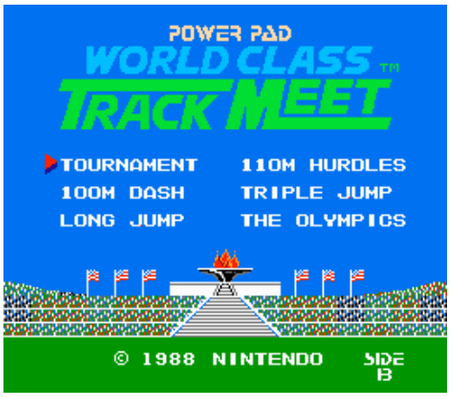




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

World Class Track Meet

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: TRY.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Track & Field, 1–6 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.

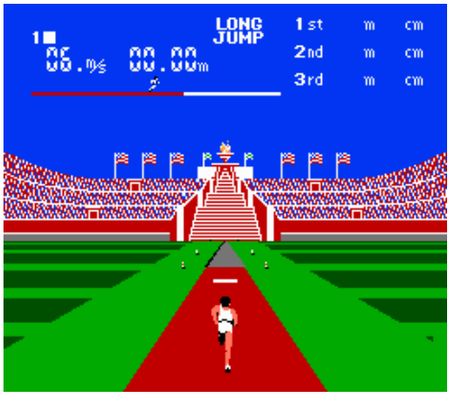


A rerelease of Bandai's *Stadium Events* (only the title screen and certain other bits of text were changed), *World Class Track Meet* was packaged with Nintendo's Power Pad, which was a rerelease of Bandai's Family Fun Fitness control mat (Nintendo forced *Stadium Events* and the Family Fun Fitness mat off the market once they began producing the items under different names). The cartridge contains four Olympic-style events: 100M Dash, 110M Hurdles, Long Jump, and Triple Jump, each requiring the use of the Power Pad. The action is viewed from behind, with players (standing alone or side by side with a second player) hopping, stepping, jogging in place, and otherwise pressing buttons on the control mat with their feet to get the onscreen characters to run and jump. You race against characters with animal names: Turtle, Bear, Horse, Rabbit, Bobcat, and Cheetah. Obviously the game is much easier to find than the extremely rare *Stadium Events*.

Notable Quotable:
"Variety is not the game's strong suit. The true depth of *WCTM* lies in discovering the best cheating strategy. Drumming on the pad with your fist may seem like a good idea, but it'll barely get you past Horse." —*Game Informer* (November 2008)

Notable Quotable:
"The action is high intensity, so it can get tiring even after a few minutes of play. The graphics are excellent . . . they do a nice job of conveying depth . . . The single player mode is shallow, but it really comes alive with a group of people huddling around the mat until they collapse in a heap!" —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

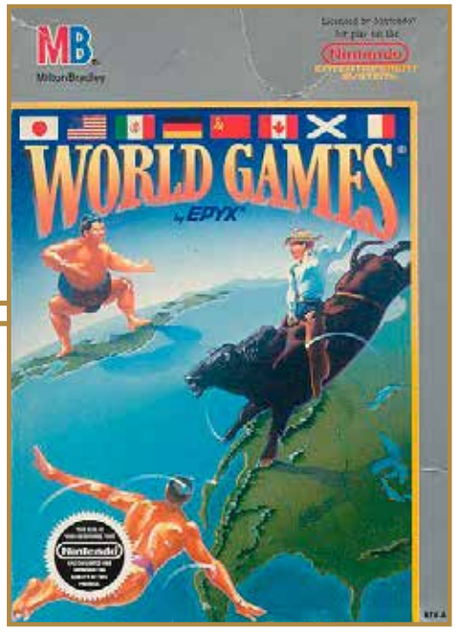
Insider Insight: Aside from the Power Glove, the Power Pad was the coolest controller for the NES, in theory at least. *World Class Track Meet* was bundled with this innovative controller, and my entire family gathered around as my older brother and I squared off for our first race. We each took our place on the mat, our socked feet trembling in excitement, and then sprinted our hearts out; our avatars onscreen seemed unimpressed with our efforts. Honestly, I've had better times in *QWOP* [a browser game using only the Q, W, O, and P keys]. It was my father who first dropped to the floor and started punching the oversized buttons, easily winning the race. For the next few weeks we all competed against each other, setting new records daily, but after the novelty wore off (along with the skin on our knuckles) the Power Pad was folded up and never used again. I have since played *World Class Track Meet* with a standard controller and found it to be much easier. However, as bad as it was with the Power Pad, they are inseparable. For me *World Class Track Meet* is defined by the Power Pad, and by the weeks my family actually gathered around the Nintendo and played the game together. —Andy Slaven, author of the *Video Game Bible: 1985–2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

World Games

PUBLISHER: Milton Bradley.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Miscellaneous, 1–8 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.



World Games is composed of eight different sporting events from around the world: Weight Lifting (Russia), Barrel Jumping (Germany), Cliff Diving (Mexico), Slalom Skiing (France), Log Rolling (Canada), Bull Riding (America), Caber Toss (Scotland), and Sumo Wrestling (Japan). Each event concludes with awards for gold, silver, and bronze medals. Depending on the event, players must press the control pad arrows in rhythm, time button presses precisely, hold buttons down, press buttons quickly, and press the d-pad in conjunction with the A button, in addition to other such control techniques. The game includes 8-bit versions of the countries' national anthems, a Practice mode, and an event travelogue with history. Based on the 1989 Epyx computer game.

Notable Quotable:

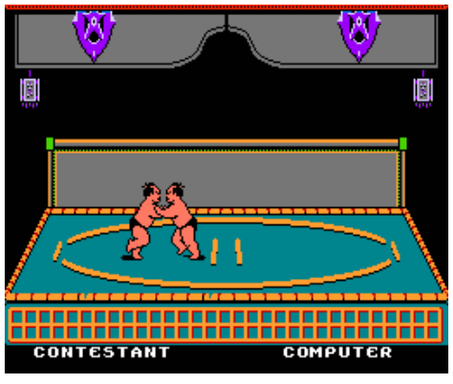
"Whimsical in tone . . . The eight events vary in complexity, so you'll want to have a copy of the manual on hand before you attempt any of these . . . weightlifting [is] one of the most complicated events . . . The snow-capped mountains in the backgrounds look nice, but the nursery rhyme background music is *awful* . . . cliff diving [is] simple and fun . . . slalom skiing [is] so difficult that just reaching the finish line without crashing is a challenge . . . While uneven in quality, *World Games* is always competitive with friends and usually good for a few laughs." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

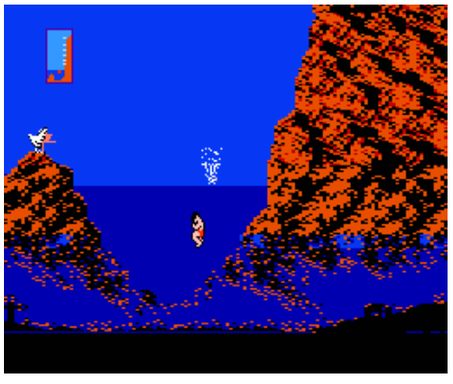
Notable Quotable:

"The controls are an absolute mess. At their least offensive the controls are easy to figure out, but difficult to actually perform, such as in the Caber Toss event, where you have to repeatedly hit left and right on the d-pad. It sounds simple, but it's utterly demanding, and moving your thumb from one side of the d-pad to the other over and over again might give you blisters . . . The Barrel Jumping and Slalom Skiing just seem out of the player's control. There are only so many buttons on an NES controller, but it seems like no matter what you do your character doesn't react. It's almost as bad as *Dark Castle* on Sega Genesis." —Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

Insider Insight: I picked up *World Games* based on box art alone. During one of my family's weekly trips to my aunt's house, which was an hour away and had no air conditioning, we stopped at a Toys "R" Us and my parents told me I could pick out any Nintendo game I wanted. I'm not sure why they let me do this, but if I were to guess, maybe they just felt sorry that I had to spend yet another Friday night at my aunt's watching *Full House* and *Family Matters* on her black-and-white TV. I perused the aisle of games and the athletes on the *World Games*' box looked awesome, so I grabbed the game's ticket and rushed up to the register.

That night, while my parents talked with my aunt, I studied each page of the *World Games* manual so I could dominate the competition once I returned home and back to my NES. Unfortunately those hours reading the manual would mean nothing because the controls in the game are simply disastrous! I watched in horror as my diver bashed his head over and over on the cliff while high diving and I slammed my controller down as my rider was bucked off his bull for the 100th time in the bull riding event. Then, all of a sudden, I would inexplicably destroy the world record in Log Rolling! Every event ended up being a test of patience and required 100% luck and 0% skill. I can't help but think of all the good games that I passed up at Toys "R" Us that night. —Mike Vito, writer for HeyPoorPlayer.com





©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wrath of the Black Manta

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: A.I.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

Armed with an endless supply of darts and a short sword, Black Manta is a mysterious crime-fighting ninja who strikes fear into anyone who preys on the innocent, especially kidnappers and members of DRAT (Drug Runners and Terrorists). As this hero, your job is to battle your way through five levels of gun-toting thugs, robot guards, evil ninjas, drug runners, terrorists, and kidnappers. During your mission you will rescue kidnapped children. You can interrogate both the victims and the thugs to try and gain useful information, such as the location of hidden areas and the weaknesses of bosses. In addition to utilizing the two standard weapon types, Black Manta can perform 10 different Ninpo Arts (after earning them from completing levels), which are highly specialized fighting techniques such as Invisibility, Fire Bomb, Fire Rain (paralyzes enemies), Missiles, Shadow (a second Manta), Teleportation, and the Spider (allows Black Manta to travel underground). Manta can also crouch, turn somersaults, and open doors. Levels include New York City (city streets and underground sewers), Tokyo, Rio De Janeiro, New York City (yes, NYC again, but this time in warehouses and underground tunnels), and DRAT Headquarters.

Notable Quotable:

"This game is only slightly above average in comparison to other action/adventure titles. The characters and backgrounds are drawn well, although the game doesn't quite move as smoothly as it should. Special hidden rooms, graphic/text screens, and more are added to expand the appeal of *Manta* . . . nothing spectacular, but it does have some decent thrills . . . If you don't have *Rolling Thunder* you might want to check it out." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1990)

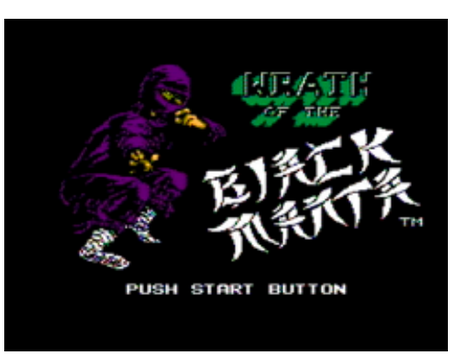
Notable Quotable:

"There are many things I like about this game, such as the fabulous between-level screens which tell a story, the fact that there are loads of secret rooms, and that the gameplay is fun with quite a bit of variety—especially the madcap flying ninja level where he looks like he's been strapped to a flying bed. However, these decent features are let down by the naff in-game graphics (the sprites are awful and the animation is poor) and the rather average sound. *Black Manta* is a pretty good *Shinobi*-type game and should be enjoyed by ardent beat-'em-up fans." —*Mean Machines* (November 1990)

Insider Insight: I was crazy about *Ninja Gaiden* back in the day, so when I found *Wrath of the Black Manta* on the rental store shelf I had to try it. I'm not sure where exactly I got the idea, but I was certain that this Taito game would be just as good as Tecmo's tour de force in every way.

It did have all the right elements—side scrolling action where you use ninja magic to take down bad guys, and lengthy story cutscenes (which were still pretty rare back in 1990). But it wasn't anywhere near as good as Ryu Hayabusa's adventure.

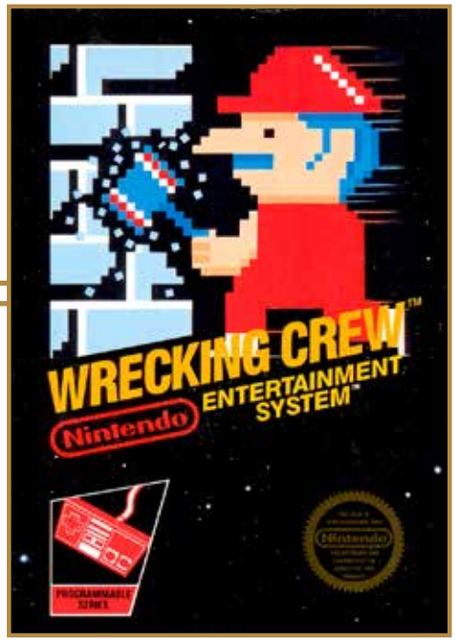
Still, I'd paid my rental fee, so I worked my way through the entire game that night. And by the end I discovered that I enjoyed *Wrath of the Black Manta* for what it was: a mediocre action platformer that can't hold a candle to its contemporaries. But not necessarily a terrible game. —Greg Sewart, game developer, former Previews and Reviews Editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wrecking Crew

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Platformer/Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1985.



An NES launch title, *Wrecking Crew* has you, as Mario, running and climbing in the interiors of buildings that are viewed from the side. Each level of the game is a vertical-scrolling playfield outfitted with walls that can be destroyed with your hammer. When all the walls are destroyed, the level is complete. If you spend too much time on the same floor, a fireball will come flying out. If Mario walks to the end of one side of the screen, he'll appear on the opposite side. As he works, Mario should avoid such enemies as Eggplant Man, Gotchawrench, and Foreman Spike, who has a tendency to hit Mario from behind and make him fall. Mario can't jump, but he can trap enemies. He can also use dynamite to open doors, escape to a lower area, and destroy several walls in a row. Mario typically dodges and traps enemies, but he can also use a whopper punch to attack an enemy on the other side of a wall. Since some platforms above Mario can't be gone back to once he has dropped off them, it's easy for him to get trapped. It's also easy to get stuck between drums, so you must think your way through each level strategically. A second player can join in as Luigi. The game features 100 puzzle-like screens, along with an edit mode where you can design (but not save) your own levels.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are up to the typical Nintendo quality, with lots of action to hold the attention of arcade lovers . . . hours of enjoyment." — *Computer Entertainer* (August 1986)

Notable Quotable:

"A game involving two of my favorite characters . . . I was hooked with this one; the morning I got it I played for two hours solid and got to level 18 BEFORE changing out of my jammies and into some clothes! *Wrecking Crew* is very playable, has plenty of levels to keep you interested, good graphics 'n' sound, and best of all, MARIO AND LUIGI." —*Computer and Video Games* (February1988)

Notable Quotable:

"What might initially seem like a pure action title is just as much of a puzzler, which adds to its depth and stops it from being a mindless destruction game. The clever and intricate stages start off basic but eventually morph into larger areas; I particularly like those that require you to use dynamite to drop platforms and then destroy a previously unbreakable wall." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

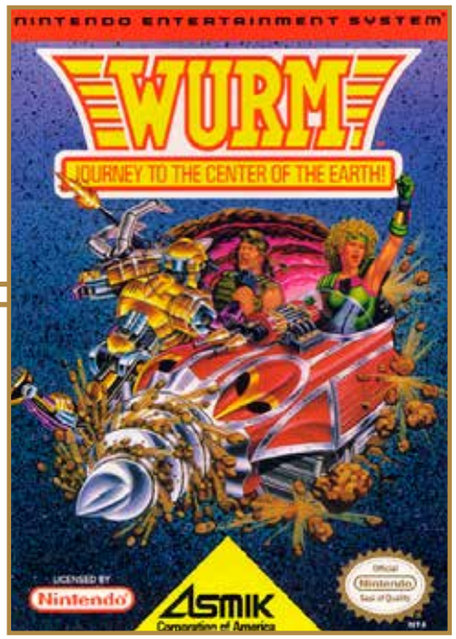
Insider Insight: One summer day when I was a kid I found myself bored out of my mind at a party thrown by one of my parents' friends. I didn't know anyone else there and I didn't bring a bathing suit, so while everyone at the party was socializing by the pool, I decided to go exploring in this stranger's house. I was elated to find that they had an NES, and even more intrigued when I turned it on and didn't recognize the game. It was called *Wrecking Crew*, and the box art was, let's say, less than inspiring. But anything would be better than listening to boring grown ups talk, right?

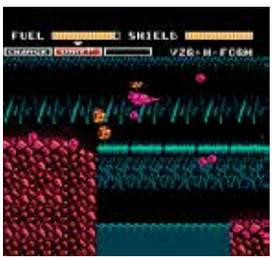
To say I was surprised when I booted up the game and the words "Mario Start" appeared on the screen would be an understatement. Not only had I successfully gotten out of being bored at this weird party, but I found a whole new Mario game I had never even heard of before! I absolutely loved the catchy music, and I got the hang of the whole "no jumping thing" in short order. *Wrecking Crew* is great, and it doesn't get nearly the credit it deserves, but for me it will always hold a special place for saving me from having to converse with strangers at a stupid party. —Kris Randazzo, host of the *Stone Age Gamer* podcast, writer for *Nintendo Force Magazine*

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Wurm: Journey to the Center of the Earth

PUBLISHER: Asmik.
DEVELOPER: Cyclone System.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.





Wurm puts players at the helm of a multiconfiguration vehicle that is designed for underground exploration and is equipped with the following weapons: cyclone drill (you have to drill through some terrain), double and triple Gatling gun, laser gun, hyper cannon, Doppler cannon, hydrosonic water cannon, and melt needle. The action is divided into four types of play: Horizontal Scroll Shooting (which includes tank mode, hover mode, and aerial mode), Vertical Scroll Shooting (featuring an overhead view of the Wurm), Cockpit Shooting/Role Playing (guide crosshairs to search for and destroy monsters, communicate with crew), and Shooting Adventure/Role Playing (get out of the vehicle to run, jump, shoot, kick, and communicate). Standard enemies include such creeps as Byrd (bird), Quartz (rock), Znail (snail), Dragon, Stargun, and Diawheel. Bosses are fairly large and include a mutant with tentacles, a stone monster, a reptilian monster with a powerful tail, a part human/part machine, and the evil ruler of the Nonmalta Empire and his right-hand monster. There are fireballs, gun emplacements, and other hazards to deal with as well. Fuel is a factor, but fuel refill power-ups are plentiful. Cinematic cutscenes play between each of the game's 20 levels, which include such areas as Crystal Cave, Ruins of Gaia, Subterranean Jungle, Underground Volcano, The Control Tower, and Underworld Empire.

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

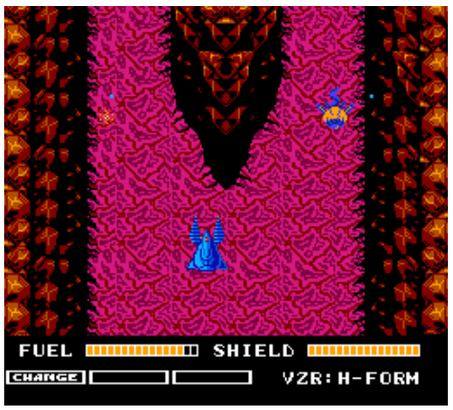
"*Wurm* turns towards originality. Instead of delivering straightforward shoot-out action it offers several fast-paced, albeit familiar, play modes . . . gives you your money's worth, but don't expect any change. Its sights and sounds are average, and given passwords and unlimited continues, ditto for the challenge. The most positive trait is the ease of interaction between player and space ship." —*GamePro* (November 1991)

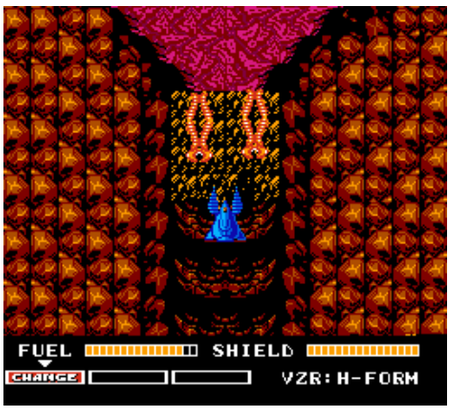
Notable Quotable:

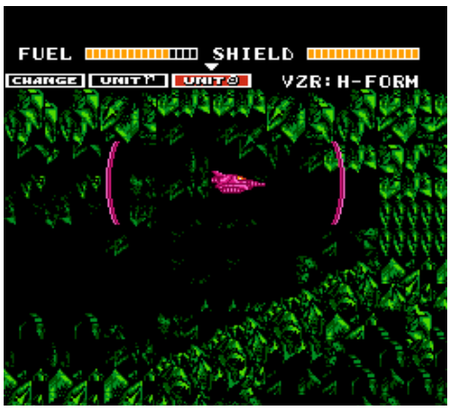
"In spite of the lackluster ending *Wurm* is still very worth playing. Few games on the NES can claim to be a shoot-'em-up and a platformer, and this places near the top of the multi-genre titles. Usually one style is favored over another when developers dream up grand concepts like this, but the modes in *Wurm* are equally balanced . . . It's just about on par with *Vice: Project Doom*, the king of the genre benders on the NES . . . soundtrack is excellent and one of my favorites on the system." —Cygnus (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"There's mystery, adventure, romance, tragedy . . . everything you could want in a poorly translated NES game . . . Sadly the story is the only interesting part . . . none of these segments are really that good on their own. Instead of having a solid amount of play in each, you're just getting into the swing of the weird transforming flying drill ship thing when you get thrown into platformer adventure mode . . . The levels are nonlinear and there are items to find and NPCs with whom to converse, but I still have trouble with the 'adventure' classification based on the sheer fact that the levels take maybe two minutes to clear if you really go out of your way to see everything . . . Most of the game's difficulty comes from not understanding what you're supposed to be doing, and after that it becomes super short and easy." —Alex Jedraszczak (gamecola.net)







WWF King of the Ring

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Eastridge Technology/Gray Matter.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Wrestling, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

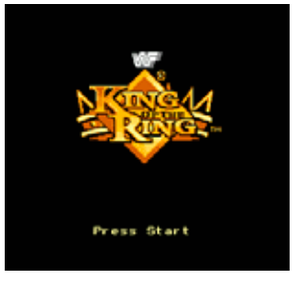
Followed by various WWF titles for the Super Nintendo and the excellent *WWF No Mercy* on the Nintendo 64, *King of the Ring* was the fourth and final WWF game for the NES, and it's much harder to find than the other three NES cartridges. The game features the typical One-on-One, Tag Team, and Tournament matches, but there's a new mode in town: King of the Ring, which is an eight-man single elimination tournament in which each match is a one-fall bout. In addition, there are now three difficulty levels (easy, medium, and hard), and players can customize their own fighter in such categories as strength, speed, and stamina. Selectable wrestlers with predetermined attributes include Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, Mr. Perfect, Bret Hart, Shawn Michaels, Yokozuna, the Narcissist Lex Luger, Razor Ramon, Bam Bam Bigelow, and The Undertaker. You can execute a variety of moves, including punch, kick, grapple, flying elbow drop, flying dropkick, head butt, body slam, throw, and suplex. The action is viewed from the side and the screen scrolls a bit to the left and right.

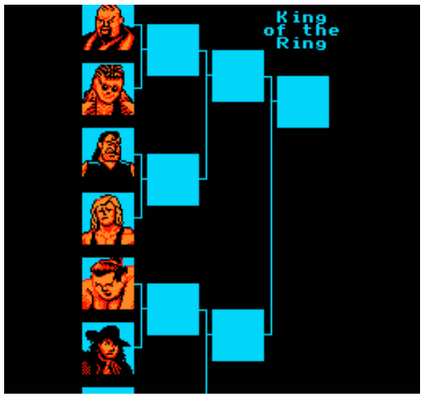
Notable Quotable:
"Yeah, it's a basic fighting game—but it's a good one. You won't find any new or exciting moves here, but you've got all the old staples of gratuitous violence readily available. In all a solid effort." —*Game Players* (July 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"A good attempt of making a quality wrestling game for a near-dead game system. The graphics are weak and lots of flicker gets annoying real fast. The gameplay is decent, and the cart proves to be fun for two players. All of the popular wrestlers are present and their special moves are relatively easy to do. This cart will appeal only to those who are caught in some cruel time warp and can't break away from 8-bit." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"There is very little difference between *WWF WrestleMania Steel Cage Challenge* and *WWF King of the Ring*, which is not surprising, as they were released just a year apart . . . it seems the varying stat levels for the wrestler don't have much of an effect on how the wrestlers perform. Razor Ramon plays a lot like Hulk Hogan and vice versa. There is no background music during the in-ring action. That gives more of a focus on the wrestlers' grunts and the excellent crowd sounds." —Ryan Dilbert (bleacherreport.com)

Insider Insight: By 1993, the world had moved on to the Super Nintendo. And rightfully so. There were some truly incredible games released for that system early in its life cycle. However, NES games were still coming out, and wrestling was incredibly popular so, naturally, the NES received a new game based on the sport that year. And while it is not the best wrestling game in the world, *WWF King of the Ring* has one of the finest rosters I've ever seen in a game of this type. Having limited space meant the developers had to pick the cream of the crop and man, did they nail it: Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, Bret Hart, The Undertaker, Shawn Michaels, Razor Ramon, Bam Bam Bigelow, Yokozuna, "The Narcissist" Lex Luger, and my favorite, Mr. Perfect. I had a lot of fun with this game, even with its limited control scheme. It played pretty well and was the perfect game to take with me on road trips to see my uncle, who had an NES. It saved me from a ton of awkward family parties, and for that I am ever grateful. —Dan Ryan, cohost of the *StoneAge Gamer* podcast, writer of beer, wrestling, gaming, kung-fu, and other geeky articles for geekade.com

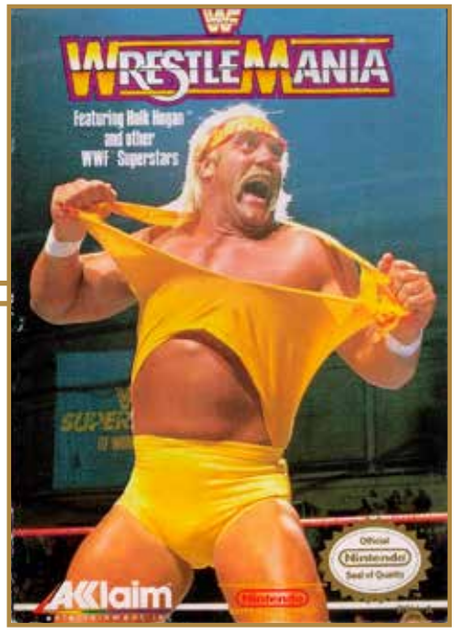




SCHILLER PUBLISHING

WWF WrestleMania

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Wrestling, 1–6 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1989.



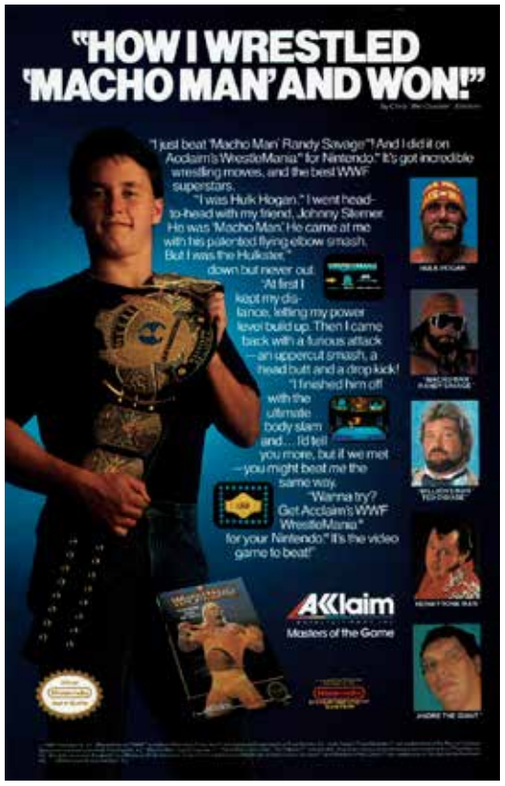
WWF WrestleMania was the first World Wrestling Federation video game. You step into the ring as one of six different professional wrestlers: Hulk Hogan (featured on the box and title screen ripping his shirt off), Ted "The Million Dollar Man" DiBiase, Bam Bam Bigelow, Honky Tonk Man, Randy "Macho Man" Savage, or Andre the Giant (my favorite wrestler when I was a kid). There is no visible crowd (the background is black), and the fighters can't leave the side view ring (which takes up only the bottom half of the screen). However, the fighters are identifiable in the ring (not always a given in the world of 8-bit gaming), and they are accompanied by their own theme music. As you battle it out in the ring, you can pull off a variety of moves, including punch, kick, dropkick, spin kick, body slam, turnbuckle leap, pin, eye gouge, cartwheel, head butt, back elbow smash, and flying elbow smash. Certain moves are specific to each wrestler, and some moves require that you have more energy than your opponent. When a wrestler turns pink and then red (which happens when he takes too many hits), it means he is mad and his attacks will have more power, giving you a fighting chance if you get behind. In addition, when your wrestler's energy gets low a special object may bounce around the ring you can grab for extra energy.

Notable Quotable:
"Wrestling fans should have a good time with this one . . . While the graphics are quite good, we marked them down just a bit due to slight blinking of the wrestlers . . . a strong sports entry into the Nintendo line." —*Computer Entertainer* (March 1989)

Notable Quotable:
"Complicated but fun, in a mindless way. It's certainly more fun than watching the loony stuff on pay-per-view! Animation is impressive. More grunts, slapping flesh, and roars from fighters and crowd would have made this more entertaining . . . *Pro Wrestling* still has it beat." —*How to Win at Nintendo Sports Games* (1990, St. Martin's Paperbacks)

Notable Quotable:
"Winning a match doesn't take much thought. Trapping and pummeling your helpless opponent in a corner is all it really takes . . . Punching and kicking are the only real maneuvers at the player's disposal . . . No grappling, save for a body slam by pressing both buttons together . . . You can climb the front ropes, but not the back . . . Each wrestler looks decent in the ring . . . Still, you can't help but think this entire presentation is crude. No crowd is present (the ring is surrounded by nothing but black space), and at least a quarter of the screen is taken up by the life bars along with the timer. The audio presentation is a small step up, featuring all the theme music for each wrestler during the in-ring action . . . the simple slapping noises that accompany each hit are generic and uninspired." —Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



Insider Insight: I clearly remember back when *WrestleMania* was still in the single digits and NBC's *Saturday Night's Main Event* was a bigger draw than *Saturday Night Live*. I loved the WWF back then and still do today. In those days we weren't inundated with weekly wrestling shows, countless TV stations, or YouTube, and it was difficult to get to watch much wrestling. We would travel several miles just to rent the videos, or possibly catch *WWF Prime Time Wrestling* on a cable channel that we didn't have locally.

So when Acclaim and Nintendo announced that the first NES WWF home console game was being released we HAD to have it! Finally, we'd get to play as our favorite WWF stars and use all of their bone-crunching moves. When my brother, nephew, and I sat down to play it for the first time, it didn't really live up to our hopes and expectations. That being said this was the '80s, and we were much more accepting of any game's shortcomings in those days. Our imaginations were definitely more advanced than the NES's capabilities, so we made the best of it. Six wrestlers were better than none, and the moves, well, we figured them out and battled away. At the end of the day *WWF WrestleMania* still brings back great memories, and for that reason alone it holds a special place in my collection. —Papa Pete the Old Guy Gamer, YouTube personality

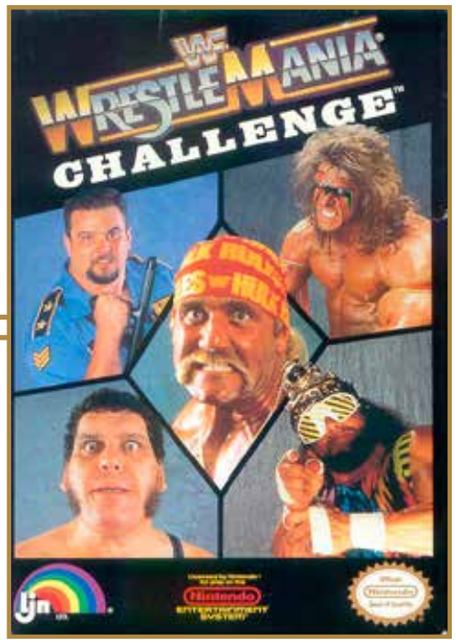
Insider Insight: As a boy who grew up in the '80s I was all about that Hulkamania life. The training, the prayers, the vitamins, the indiscriminate destruction of one's shirt in front of others—it was all for me. As a fan of both wrestling and video games, I adored Nintendo's entry into the squared circle, *Pro Wrestling*. When I heard there was going to be an official *WWF WrestleMania* game for the NES I couldn't wait to see how good it was. After all, if Nintendo could make an awesome wrestling video game with generic characters, surely whatever offering WWF and Acclaim had coming my way with my favorite wrestlers was going to be amazing, right?

I was super excited when I found out that my cousins David and Steven had the game and I got over there as soon as I could. There was already a group of kids crowded around the NES in the basement when I arrived, and there was only one thing we all wanted to do: play the game as Hulk Hogan! While the other kids battled it out I tried to study the manual, but I kept getting distracted by the picture of Hulk Hogan on the cover and inside. He looked mad that someone at the all-you-can-eat buffet told him that he couldn't have any more and that he had to leave. I always thought that Acclaim could have found a better picture.

When I finally had my turn as the Hulkster I thought that it was one of the coolest things ever. But after playing it for a little while my mind started to change, and we ultimately thought the same thing: "This isn't as good as *Pro Wresting*, is it?" And we were right. While the game did boast some cool wrestlers (except you, Honky Tonk Man—no one cares), it just didn't have that awesome pick-up-and-play of *Pro Wrestling*. —John Trenbeath, Co-Organizer of Gaming4Guts, Co-Host of the *Bits & Pieces Podcast*

WWF WrestleMania Challenge

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Wrestling, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.



WWF WrestleMania Challenge, which was the second WWF game on the NES, keeps only three fighters from *WWF WrestleMania* (Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant, and Randy Savage) but adds five new ones: Brutus Beefcake, Ravishing Rick Rude, Big Boss Man, Hacksaw Jim Duggan, and Ultimate Warrior. Or the gamer can decide to play as his or herself, but there is no customization in this regard. Each wrestler has a few moves only he can do. Special power moves are executed by pressing A and B simultaneously. There are corner post moves but no running attacks. The view of the ring is now from a ¾ perspective, giving it a diamond-shaped appearance and making certain moves harder to pull off accurately since the angles are tougher to judge. Thankfully wrestlers can now grapple and fight outside of the ring, and there's even a crowd looking on. Modes of play include Eight-Man Tournament, One-on-One, Tag Team, Two Players vs. Computer, and Survivor Series, in which each player captains a three-man team.

Notable Quotable:

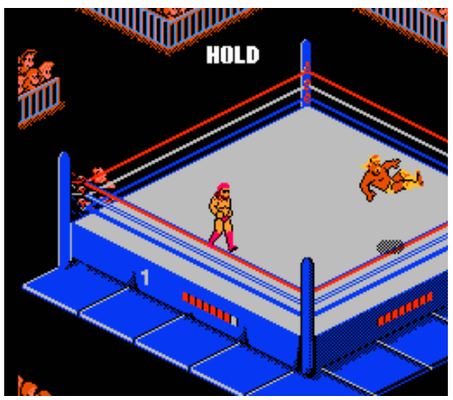
"The graphics are good and the wrestling moves are quite impressive. But at the end of the day it's neither challenging nor very exciting." —*Total!!* (January 1992)

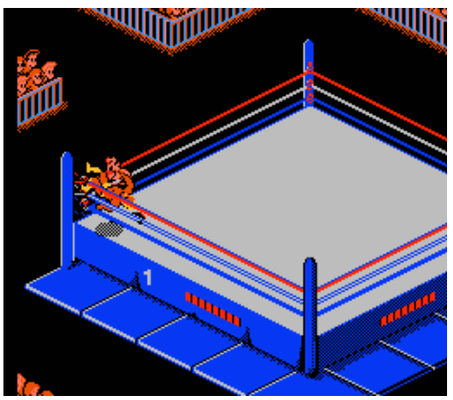
Notable Quotable:

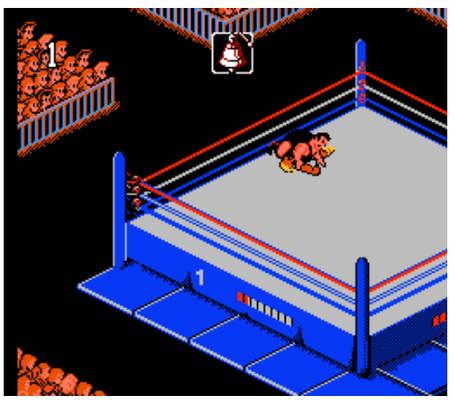
"At first glance the game looks a tad spartan—there's not much to see and it all appears a little whiffy—but looks can be very deceiving! Pick up that joypad and all of a sudden you discover a great little game that'll have you thumping the canvas for more! With a wide variety of moves on offer, including some truly stupendous gob-smacking wrestle whacks, this is a laugh from beginning to end. The computer opponent's pretty good and it'll take you quite a while to flatten him, which guarantees the testability of the game. Generally this is a fine title which does the whole WWF phenomena proud, and here's a cart I know I'll be going back to again and again." —*Computer and Video Games* (December 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"*WWF* is a fun game which pretty much manages to capture the atmosphere of the real thing. Playability is its strongest point, with plenty of neat features and options—each wrestler's range of different moves is superb. The computer opponents are good but the two-player mode is best, with plenty of fun-packed grippin' and grapplin' japes. However, the graphics and sound are both disappointing, and don't reflect the overall standards set by the gameplay. WWF fans will certainly enjoy this, but if you're simply after wrestling action and aren't bothered by the absence of such famous names as Big Boss Man and Hulk Hogan check out *Tecmo World Wrestling*, which I think is even better!" —*Mean Machines* (November 1991)



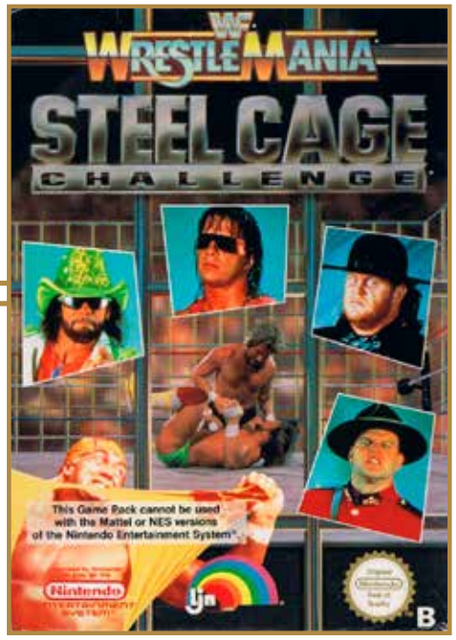




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

WWF WrestleMania: Steel Cage Challenge

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Wrestling, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



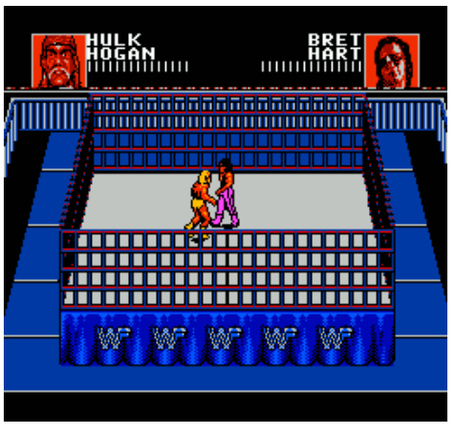
The third WWF game for the NES, *Steel Cage Challenge* lets players step into the ring as one of 10 different professional wrestlers: Hulk Hogan, "Rowdy" Roddy Piper, Sid Justice, Ted DiBiase, The Mountie, The Undertaker, Bret "Hit Man" Hart, Irwin R. Schyster, Jake "The Snake" Roberts, or Randy Savage. The game includes four standard match types: One-on-One, Tag Team, Tag Team World Championship Tournament, and Single World Championship Tournament. There are also Cage Matches, in which players need only climb to the top of the cage while the other fighter is down. Wrestlers can pull off a variety of fighting moves, including elbow drop, body slam, drop kick, turnbuckle smash, and flying clothesline. The cage looks neat (though the wrestlers are more realistic in *WWF WrestleMania*), and Howard "The Fink" Finkel is on hand to introduce fights via text balloons and a static head shot.

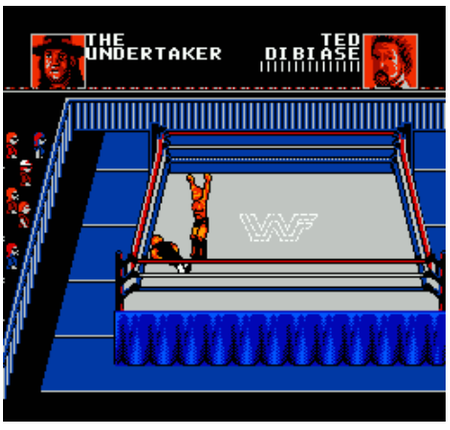
Notable Quotable:

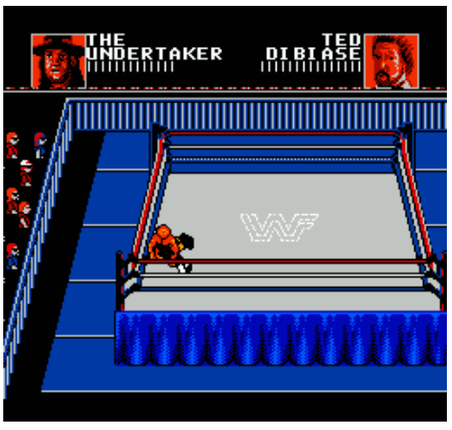
"The moves list is small, and no character-specific stats or special moves are available . . . each wrestler is exactly the same, and with little strategy involved, each match ends up with mindless and continuous button mashing. You can climb out of the ring, but weirdly you're only able to return through the left and right sides. The AI is dumb, and many times during cage matches they'll run straight into the steel and knock themselves out! The camera movement is jerky, and the poor sprite animation makes the action look like a stop motion slideshow . . . a simple brawler that's been disguised as a wrestling game . . . little depth . . . flawed and repetitive." —Roberto Rodriguez (www.retrogamesreview.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:

"How does the newly added Cage Match feature work? Well, it's no different, really. Just beat down the opponent until they have no more health, and while they're down on the mat move to the left or right side of the cage and hold left or right until you get to the top . . . graphics are decent, but compared to the previous game there is some drop in quality . . . decent adaptations of all of the wrestler themes . . . there's no music during the match. You get silence throughout, with the only sound effects coming from hitting the opponent, or the crowd cheering, which is a very annoying sound . . . really lacks in the fun factor that seemed to have finally found its way into these games after the dismal first outing." —Raymond Gallant (www.freakinawesomenetwork.net)



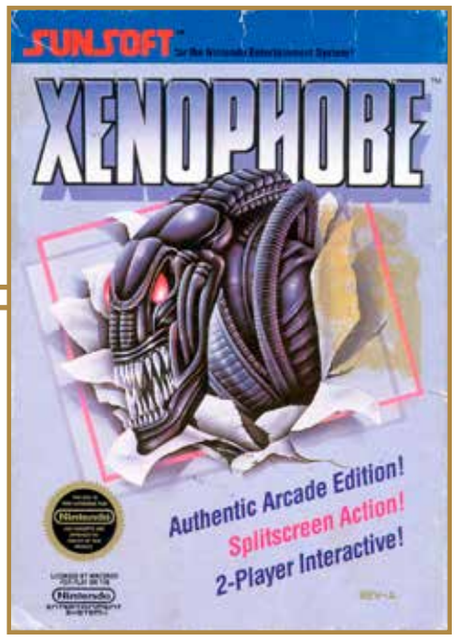




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Xenophobe

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft.
DEVELOPER: Sunsoft.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.



Emergency! Snotterpillers, Spiderions, Giant Slime Amoebas, and other nasty, vicious aliens that look like they were designed by H. R. Giger have infested eight space stations. These stations are composed of nonscrolling, sideview rooms connected by exit doors (on the right and left sides) and elevators. As one of three outer space exterminators, you, or you and a friend in split screen action, are the only hope against the vile creatures. Armed with a pulse gun, you must kill the Xenos aliens as quickly as possible before the space station you are on self-destructs (after approximately five minutes), but there is no onscreen info on kills remaining or how much time is left. By destroying certain Xenos you can earn such special weapons as a laser pistol, a lightning gun, a smoke gun, and bombs. If you kill enough Xenos in time, the space station will be cleared and you'll get bonus points. The game ends when you run out of health, but you can increase it by grabbing medicine and cups, and by clearing a space station. Some aliens hang from the ceiling, others jump, and still others hunker low to the ground, making the game a challenge. Also making the game a challenge (but not in a good way) are counterintuitive controls that make you press A + down to crouch and A again to stand up. Another annoying aspect is the small size of the playfield, as it takes up only half of the screen, even when you are playing solo. *Xenophob*e, which has cool weapons and aliens but mediocre gameplay, is based on Bally/Midway's 1987 semiclassic, but it lacks a three-player mode, rapid fire, and diagonal fire. In addition, there are only three playable characters in the NES port instead of nine.

Notable Quotable:

"One of those games I remember being better than it is . . . a far cry from the excellent arcade machine . . . gets boring real fast. Not very challenging . . . Above average music . . . colorful, high-contrast visuals . . . Much more fun to play with a friend." —80s Comics (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"When you finish stage eight there's no ending, no reward. You simply start over again, and you play through all the levels again and again and again . . . The graphics are bad . . . The sound is nonexistent—just bloops and bleeps . . . the levels are boring, the enemies repetitive. You look like an idiot when you walk . . . *Xenophobe* is just bad." —NESComplex (YouTube)

Insider Insight: I vividly remember the first time I saw *Xenophobe* in the arcades. It was at a theme park, and it sat proudly in the middle of the hall. I was excited to play the game with my brother and sister and promptly hassled my dad for some 10p pieces. This was partly because the game supported up to three players, but also because it seemed to be based on the film *Aliens*, which I had recently watched on VHS. It quickly became our favorite multi-player arcade game, a position previously held by another Midway game, *Rampage*. It wasn't until recent years that I discovered Brian Colin created both games.

As soon as the first home versions of *Xenophobe* were released I promptly purchased the game on tape for my ZX Spectrum computer. I bought the game again when I picked up an Atari Lynx in 1990. I loved *Xenophobe* so much, in fact, that I bought it for just about every relevant system. Even after owning the Lynx port, which is by far the best home version, as it includes a multitude of extra features, I bought the Atari 2600 version when I saw it in Toys "R" Us. I also picked up the Atari ST disk at a local shop. In more recent years I added the Commodore 64, Atari 7800, Atari XE and, of course, NES versions to my collection.

My love for Midway's marvelous alien blaster reached its zenith in 2015, when I got to speak to Brian Colin, as well as Atari Lynx programmer Gil Colgate, while writing "The Making of Xenophobe" for *Retro Gamer* magazine. In the article I compared all the home versions with the arcade original. While Sunsoft's NES port is far from the best looking version, it's still very playable and, most importantly, retains the multiplayer mode (although pared down to 2 rather than 3 players). *Xenophobe* also has a special place in my son's heart, as it is one of the first retro games he ever played. —Kieren Hawken, who is from England and has been writing about video games professionally for more than 15 years

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Xevious

PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: Namco.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1988.

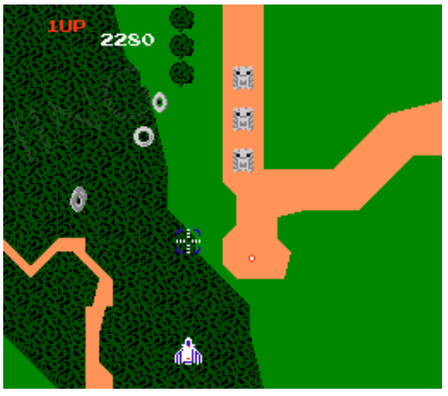
In this simple but challenging shooter you control a Solvalou fighter plane over forests, roads, and lakes, firing antiaircraft missiles (straight ahead) at attack drones, corkscrew attack planes, and other airborne enemies. You can also drop bombs, which you aim via a reticule attached to the front of your ship, on such surface targets as amphibious vehicles and floating fortresses through 16 levels of play. Such is the premise of *Xevious*, based on Namco's classic 1983 arcade game. The level design, graphics, sound effects, and music are about as faithful to the quarter-muncher as you could expect from the 8-bit workhorse. With the exception of an occasional respite between onslaughts you're constantly under attack. The screen gets pretty full at times but the action is rarely frustrating. There always seems to be at least one small section of the playfield free of enemy ships or gunfire. The enemies are varied and tricky, keeping things interesting and fresh after repeated play. Also impressive is the game's almost complete lack of slowdown. No matter how crazy things get in the heat of battle, the NES engine keeps things running with nary a hitch. The ship you command is a tad slow, the music is repetitive, and the graphics are sparse in sections, but these are small gripes.

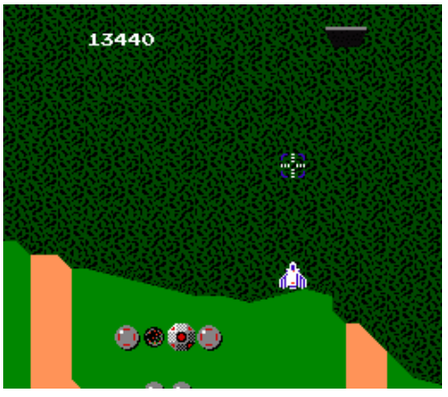
Memories: I distinctly remember playing *Xevious* when it was brand new. I was at a local mall arcade called The Land of Oz, where I spent a lot of time during my junior high and high school years. Two things about the game stood out to me: the rotating/flying square obstacles, which had sort of a 3-D look, and the fact that you could target ground-based enemies and drop bombs on them, which was a first for the genre. Half a decade later I was very impressed with the NES port.

Notable Quotable:
"*Xevious* definitely lacks the flash and frenzied pace of shooters released both before and after it, but it's worthy of its place in the genre." —*Game Informer* (May 2003)

Notable Quotable:
"The premise is simple, but it's one of those games you just can't stop playing . . . a superb job of maintaining the look, sound, and feel of the original coin-op . . . the only home version that duplicates the music and sound effects of the arcade game . . . If you like the arcade game, you'll definitely want to add this game to your NES library." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1988)

Notable Quotable:
"It's hard to find fault with such a faithful translation of this 'semi-classic' arcade game . . . The scenery consists of generic foliage and brown roads, and the buildings lack the 3D illusion they conveyed in the arcade version . . . The arcade game was relentlessly hard, but this version is far more accessible . . . one of the first games to incorporate large 'bosses,' and thankfully they're not very hard to destroy. One thing I don't like about *Xevious* is those black missiles that seem to materialize out of nowhere . . . *Xevious* hardly seems like the groundbreaking game it once was, but this well-designed shooter is still a good time." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)





Xexyz

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: Atlus.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

In the year 2777, Earth had been so ravaged by nuclear war and natural disasters that its remaining surface area consisted of just five small islands forming a new nation called Xexyz. In addition to humans, Xexyz was inhabited by fairies and spirits who lived under the ruling of King Xeu Star. One day a mechanical fortress from outer space called Goruza attacked Xexyz, built mechanical castles on each island, and captured the king's daughter. Tired of living under the harsh new leadership of Goruza, a man called Apollo donned his space battle suit and set out to confront the creature's empire. *Xexyz* consists of two different playing modes: action and shooting. The action mode is a side-scrolling platformer where you, as Apollo, shoot numerous mechanical creatures, and the shooting mode is a side-scroller similar to *Gradius* or *R-Type*. Each style of play alternates as the game progresses. In the shooting mode you can pick up power capsules that strengthen your firepower and speed capsules that strengthen your mobility. In the action mode you will find money for items and power-ups, including hand beams, foot wings, lasers, wave balls, mirrors, moon balls, and typhoons, which make Appollo turn into a tornado for nine seconds. You can enter fairy- and spirit-inhabited rooms to play games or purchase things you'll need. The final level takes place at Goruza Castle.

Notable Quotable:

"What begins as a slightly below average adventure game becomes a much more complex and intriguing action title loaded with multiple environments. After getting into the game I became hooked. The graphics aren't great, but the execution is well laid out and slightly addictive . . . not a fabulous game, but one that offers enough to draw most action fans." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1990)

Notable Quotable:

"Even the first level's boss can be a tough one to break if you're only using your normal weapon . . . But even with the right weapon you'll still be in for a very tough fight with a few of the later bosses . . . enemies' bullets take down a wealthy chunk of energy with each hit . . . The controls aren't too bad, but they still needed some improvements. While Apollo moves quite nicely on the ground, the frustrating moments kick in when you're jumping to other platforms, especially later in the game. The problem is that Apollo feels a bit loose when he's in the air, which makes it tricky to dodge the onslaught of enemies . . . good reflexes are your best friend . . . The main character, supporting characters, and enemies are all well-crafted and quite detailed for the most part. The backgrounds and overall colors in the game are bright and lush, giving *Xexyz* a rather upbeat look, considering the game's plot. The boss characters are usually big and imposing, not to mention ugly in that evil sort of way . . . The music is one of the absolute best parts of the game." —Jamie Alston (www.pixlbit.com)

Insider Insight: I first heard about *Xexyz* on a "Top 10 Obscure NES Titles" type video, and I'm glad I did. I really like games that attempt multiple genres, even more so when developers manage to get those genres right. This game delivers in that area, as the play style changes from a platformer to a horizontal scrolling shooter and back again, and it feels good the whole way. I really enjoyed the music, but the visuals are a bit basic; I like the way everything looks but it's not overly detailed. When I got this one, I sat down one Saturday and played it from start to finish. At the time it was one of the more rewarding playthroughs I had done. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Yo! Noid

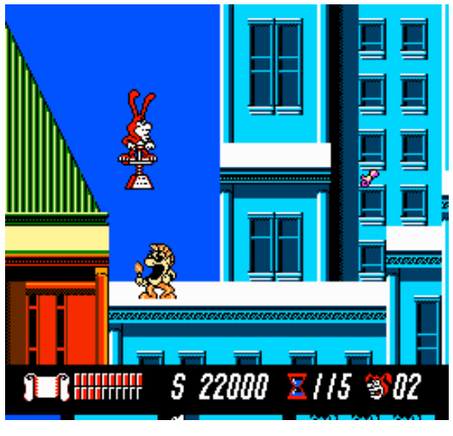
PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Now Production.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.

Starring Domino's Pizza's floppy-eared mascot, *Yo! Noid* puts you in control of the buck-toothed pizza eater. New York is under attack by a Noid look-alike called Mr. Green and his many flunkies. As the real Noid, armed with a killer yo-yo, your job is to cruise the city while avoiding traps and jumping over obstacles. You'll battle pirates, hooligans, barrel throwers, flying fish, dive bombers, and other enemies with your "shoot the moon" yo-yo trick. For an added boost Noid can grab scrolls that give him magical powers, such as smart bombs and the ability to freeze the action. Also there are inventions Noid rides at certain points in the game, including a HyperBoard (skateboard), a Pizza Crusher (pogo stick), and an Ornithopter (one-man flying machine). The action takes place in New York City, including Central Park, the Bronx, on the rooftops of skyscrapers, in the skies, and on the wharf. After each odd-numbered level Noid must enter a pizza-eating contest. Adapted from *Kamen no Ninja Hanamaru* for the Famicom but altered in the US to promote the Noid character.

Notable Quotable:
"While it seems *Noid* is targeted to a younger age group, it has a high level of challenge that can be appreciated by experienced gamers. Nothing really special as far as concepts go, but solid gameplay and cute graphics produce another good game from Capcom." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1990)

Notable Quotable:
"Graphically *Yo! Noid* is reasonably detailed, which is surprising, given the apparent lack of concern for the plot. The backgrounds are nice, and despite the fact that it is meant to be New York City but looks nothing like it, the levels themselves still work well. They are a collection of platform game clichés, from the 'waterfront level with holes in the boardwalks' to 'icy level that causes you to slip around uncontrollably.' Still, *Noid* pulls them off competently. The characters have a very cartoony look and are drawn sharply . . . music is campy and upbeat, which is proper for the game this is trying to be. Similar story for the effects—cartoonish and forgettable. The Noid does control responsively and has to make a number of harrowing jumps throughout the levels. The controls allow you to do this solidly . . . average platformer with some decent skateboarding and flying levels tossed in . . . Its only real ingenuity is in the pizza eating card game, but that's not saying a lot." —Just Games Retro (www.justgamesretro.com)

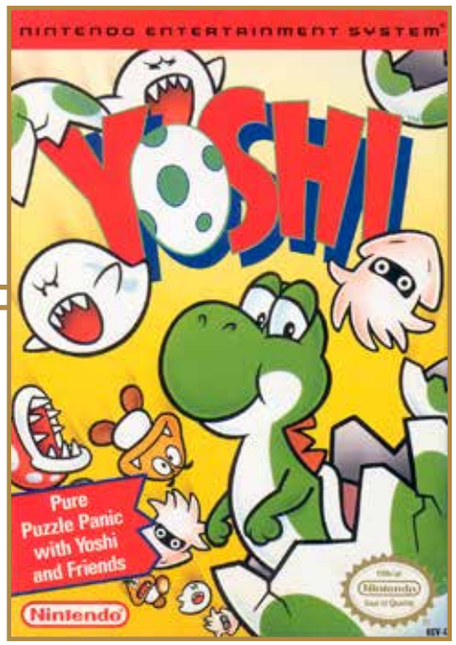
Insider Insight: The Noid is one of those forgotten '80s mascots. His main goal was to ruin pizzas, so I find it fitting that he had his own bad game on the NES. Cheap deaths, horrible enemy placement, and one-hit deaths plague the game, but I am absolutely addicted to this mess! The Noid was one of my favorite characters growing up—I even had a little rubber figure of him, so of course I was going to play this game. The first time I rented it I played it the entire weekend and couldn't even beat the first stage. Fortunately, as I got older I got better at it. There's just something about *Yo! Noid* that gives me that urge to keep on trying one more time when I get a game over. There's actually a lot of creative design in the levels, especially with the skateboard level and the flying areas, but the flaws I mentioned will ruin the experience for most gamers. —"8-Bit Eric" Perez, YouTube personality



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Yoshi

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Game Freak.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



Yoshi, the lovable dino who first appeared in *Super Mario World* for the SNES, gets his own game! It is a "falling object" puzzler in which your job is to maneuver Mario horizontally along the bottom of the screen, shuffling four trays and catching characters and eggshells that fall from the top of the playfield. Said characters include Piranha Plant, Little Goomba, Bloober, and Boo Buddy. When you match two characters of the same type, they disappear. If you stack too many characters that don't match, they begin to clutter the screen, eventually rising to the top line. Once a stack grows above the top line, the game is over. Regarding the eggs, you should match up the top and bottom halves of the eggs, effectively hatching Yoshi out of each newly formed egg. Any character(s) caught between the two properly matched egg halves will be removed from the screen. In the two-player, split-screen mode, the second gamer controls Luigi. *Yoshi* evokes such action puzzles as *Tetris*, *Columns*, *Tetris Attack*, and *Yoshi's Cookie*, but it's less substantive and less fun than those games. Chain reactions and combos are nonexistent, for example.

Notable Quotable:

"There's not a whole lot of big action going on, making this game a big bore. I doubt even the kids will enjoy this for too long . . . the gameplay is very shallow. It only makes you want to play *Tetris* more." —Joe Santulli (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

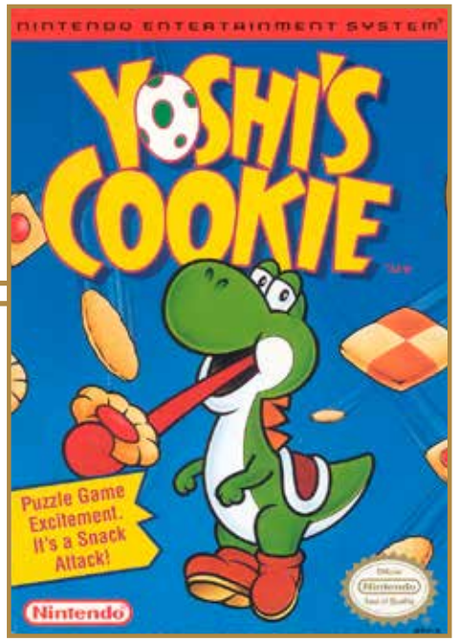
"*Yoshi* enjoys plenty of *Tetris*-style action, plus humorous graphics reminiscent of some of my favorite games. The colors are vibrant, but I can't see giving *Yoshi* on the NES anything better than the GB version. The colored graphics are cute, and the sound is a little different, but overall the game lost a bit in the translation. An above average puzzler, though." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1992)

Insider Insight: While you don't actually play as Yoshi here, this is an enjoyable game with good graphics, music, and gameplay. I played this one quite a bit when I first started collecting again as a teenager. My dad didn't own it when I was a child so I was playing it for the first time, and I really liked it a lot. There's something so satisfying about condensing a huge pile of baddies into a single Yoshi egg and scarfing it down. The game can get frenzied in short order, so it's important to keep your wits about you and react quickly. This is one of the better NES puzzle games. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality

© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Yoshi's Cookie

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Bullet-Proof Software.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.



In *Yoshi's Cookie* you use a cursor to shift horizontal rows and vertical columns of randomly sequenced cookies in a square bin. When all the cookies in a line are of the same type (heart, flower, diamond, check, circle, or Yoshi) that row or column will disappear. As play goes on, more cookies will enter the playfield from the top and the side. In one player mode Yoshi-shaped cookies act as wild cards, meaning they can be matched with other cookie types. In two-player split-screen mode, when you line up five Yoshis in a row it sabotages your opponent, such as scrambling their cookies, controlling their cursor, blocking their screen, adding to your point total, or subtracting from their point total. The action moves quickly, so you'll often pull off combos by sheer luck. Gamers can play as Mario, Yoshi, the Princess, or Bowser. With more than 100 levels (including an expert's game) in the one-player mode and an entertaining, highly competitive two-player mode, which is a race for points, *Yoshi's Cookie* is a solid entry in the action puzzle genre.

Notable Quotable:

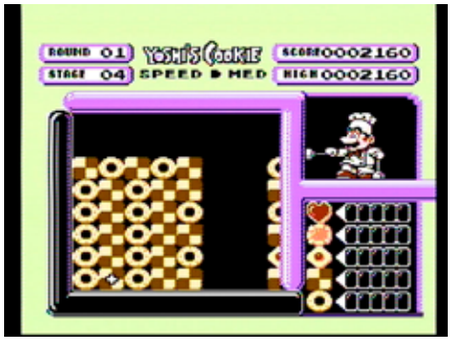
"Visuals are simple and clear . . . The music is an ever-repeating tune that can get a little annoying, but one that gets stuck in your head nonetheless. You'll find yourself whistling it at random moments. Controls are excellent . . . topnotch versus mode . . . accessible yet challenging, addictive, and fun." —Tom Lenting (www.defunctgames.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The design may sound a bit confusing, and compared to more immediately understandable puzzlers like *Tetris* it does take a bit of a mental shift to wrap your head around—but you pick it up quickly after the first few rounds of play. The only real downfall to how *Yoshi's Cookie* is designed is that you'll often find yourself left with only one or two cookies in your stack and you'll have to wait around for the game to spawn new pieces for you, and hope that it gives you the right ones to be able to make a match and clear the stage. That waiting period can last a while . . . fairly fun, but its appeal has never eclipsed those more traditional 'falling block' puzzlers like *Tetris*, *Dr. Mario*, or *Puyo Puyo* . . . fair and favorable . . . Give it a look if you're a fan of the genre looking for something that's just a bit different." —Lucas M. Thomas (www.ign.com), playing the NES game downloaded to the Wii

Insider Insight: I first played *Yoshi's Cookie* at my cousin's house during a family event and was immediately engaged by the unique puzzle mechanics. I connected with the fact that player movements controlled entire rows of pieces, as opposed to moving one by one. This created cascades of matches that were fun to watch and could turn a potential loss into a victory if you planned correctly.

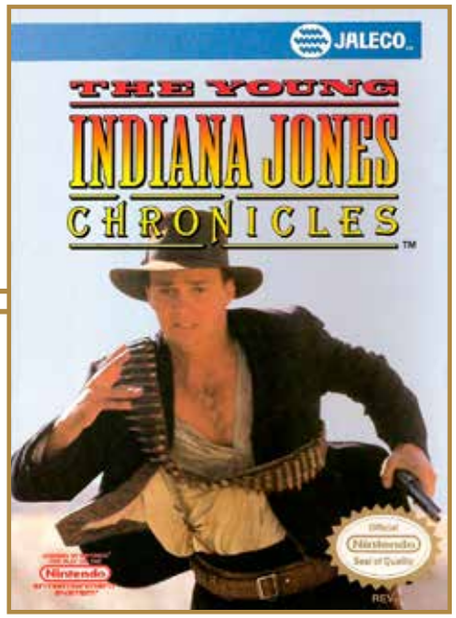
Decades later, my team at Graphite Lab was tasked with designing a puzzle game featuring the RollerCoaster Tycoon brand for Atari. Our challenge was finding ways to make roller coaster rails a meaningful puzzle element. Reflecting on the mechanics of *Yoshi's Cookie*, we imagined puzzle pieces moving a full row at a time. We evolved this approach by placing the puzzle pieces of our game on roller coaster rails. Players could drag various pieces throughout the game board in an effort to make matches in a fun and unique way. *Yoshi's Cookie* inspirations can now be seen through our "rail match system" found in the mobile game *RollerCoaster Tycoon Story*. —Matt Raithel, Studio Director, Graphite Lab; Professor of Practice of Game Design, Maryville University

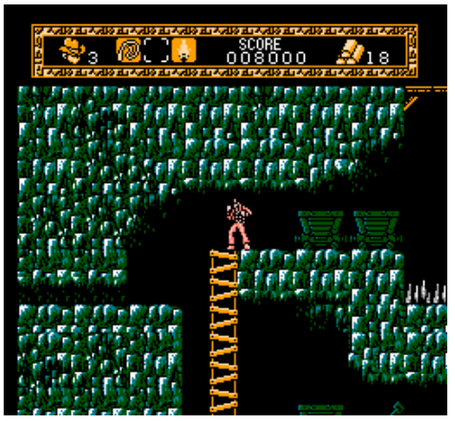


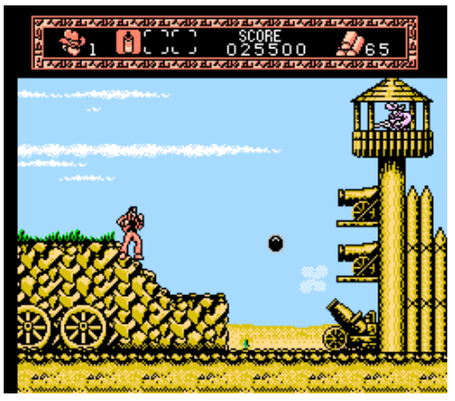
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Jaleco.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.







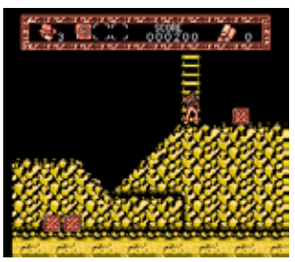
The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles lets players guide a fresh-faced Indy through parts of Mexico, France, and Germany, including cliffs, deserts, a weapons facility, a railway, and a silver mine. The action takes place during the Mexican Revolution and World War I. Our hero must avoid traps and pitfalls and battle such enemies as guard dogs, snakes, tanks, turrets, and German soldiers. Indy can equip dynamite, bombs, handguns, throwing knives, machine guns, and his trusty whip, the last of which makes the action somewhat similar to *Castlevania*. Unfortunately Indy can carry only one weapon at a time. When down to one hit point (from a maximum of three), Indy loses his weapon and is reduced to using his fists. Items, which are revealed by destroying boxes, include gold, gas masks, torches, flashlights, statues of power (for freezing enemies), and magic amulets (for temporary invincibility). At certain points Indy will ride a motorcycle, commandeer a tank, and fly a plane, lending variety to the relatively straightforward platforming action, which scrolls horizontally and vertically. Loosely based on the 1990s television series.

Notable Quotable:

"Who would have thought that the best Indiana Jones game for the NES would be based on the short-lived *Young Indiana* television series? Yet *Young Indiana Jones* replicates the Indiana Jones feel almost as well as the *Super Star Wars* trilogy captured the essence of their respective films . . . Expect a hearty challenge . . . Like the best action platformers, though, it teaches as it punishes." —Dylan Cornelius (questicle.net)

Notable Quotable:

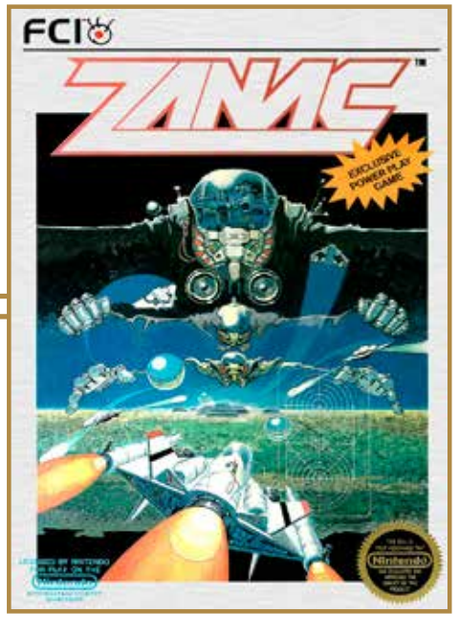
"One of the best, most underrated television shows of the early 1990s was *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* . . . Unfortunately the game's quality falls well short of the series. When I started playing *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* I was immediately reminded of *Castlevania* . . . Fortunately the game is only a *Castlevania* clone until you get your first weapon, which—for better or worse—replaces the whip. I came to the full realization that I wasn't playing as Simon Belmont when my weapon was stripped after being hit once and I died after only having my fists to fight with . . . the lack of times you can take hits makes the game frustratingly hard . . . The only way I could really recommend this game is if you have a ton of time on your hands and don't mind countless trips through areas you've memorized." —Christopher Michael Baker (formerly at allgame.com)



OSCILLATOR PUBLISHING

Zanac

PUBLISHER: FCI.
DEVELOPER: Compile.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1987.



As the pilot of the star fighter AFX-6502-ZANAC, you are humanity's only hope against The System, which is slaughtering human beings by the millions. The ship you control uses eight special weapons, including the All Range Weapon, which fires into controlled directions; the Straight Crusher, which starts off slowly and crushes enemy weapons; the Field Shutter, which acts as a shield; the Circular, a weapon that circulates around your ship; the Vibrator, which vibrates left and right; the Rewinder, which climbs up slowly and decelerates as it falls; the Plasma Flash, which acts as a smart bomb in the air; and High Speed, which acts as a smart bomb on the ground. You can use these weapons only one at a time. As you fly along shooting everything in sight (in the air and on the ground) and catching weapon power-ups, you will be confronted by a variety of enemies, each of which flies and shoots in specific patterns. For example: a Duster is a rock that fires at long range; a type 1 Umber scatters bullets in seven directions; and a type 2 Veybar slants down, reverses, zooms, and then shoots bullets. At certain points during the game, the vertical scrolling will stop and you must destroy the boss of that fortress within a certain time limit.

Notable Quotable:

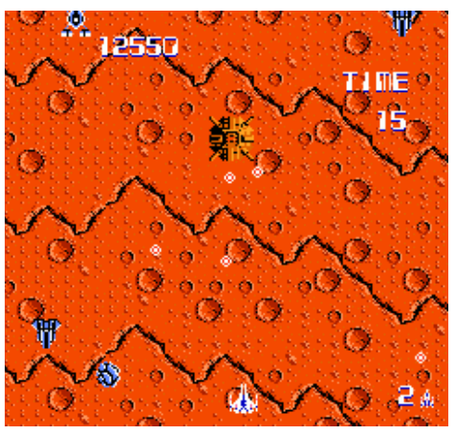
"This is like playing *Alpha Mission* with funhouse mirrors! Fast, surreal, and utterly original, *Zanac* is a must-have game." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games II* (St. Martin's Press, 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"For the most part I found the difficulty fair. The scoring system is generous and you'll rack up extra lives . . . has held up amazingly in terms of gameplay and is one of the better shooters for the NES. A long, varied quest and a strong power-up system combine to provide hours of entertainment. Don't pass this one up." —ClassicGames.Net (www.classic-games.net)

Notable Quotable:

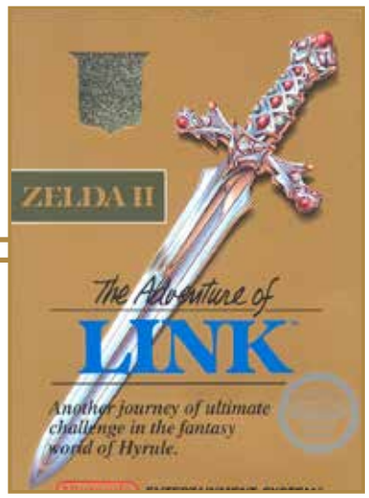
"We really enjoyed playing *Zanac*. It has all the speedy action you could desire in a space game. The array of weapons is lavish and imaginative. The music is good, and the otherworldly sound effects are outstanding. Graphic detail in the planet's surface is very good and gives a sense of depth . . . We were very impressed by the exceptionally smooth implementation of the controller interface. The ship is wonderfully responsive to the slightest movement of control pad or joystick." —*Computer Entertainer* (October 1987)



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Zelda II: The Adventure of Link

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D4.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1988.



Mixing real-time battles with a combination of side-scrolling action and RPG elements, *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link* puts you in the role of Link, a brave young lad with a sword in one hand and a shield in the other. The world you'll explore is home to a variety of landscapes, including plains, caves, bridges, rivers, mountains, deserts, forests, swamps, and graveyards. The world is also home to many helpful citizens who will help by offering clues and secret messages.

In *The Legend of Zelda*, the first game in this iconic series, Link overthrew the evil Ganondorf, took back the Triforce, and rescued Princess Zelda. Many seasons have passed since these events, and trouble is brewing once again. The formerly peaceful kingdom of Hyrule is in a state of utter turmoil as Ganondorf's influence is still in place, causing chaos and disorder. Ganondorf himself may return.

One day, around the time of Link's 16th birthday, a strange mark resembling the crest of the kingdom of Hyrule appears on Link's hand. He reports this anomaly to Impa, Princess Zelda's nursemaid. Upon seeing the birthmark Impa takes Link to Zelda's resting place, where she lies comatose as the result of a magic spell cast by an evil magician. To revive the princess and restore order to the kingdom, Link must unite the Triforce, of which there are three kinds: Power, Wisdom, and Courage. This requires a treacherous journey to defeat the guardians of six palaces and return six precious crystals to their origins in six stone statues.

During your journey you'll gain experience by hacking and slashing devils, creepy crawlies, alligator soldiers, ghosts, and other members of Ganondorf's informal society of underlings. Battles are fought in real time from a sideview perspective, and Link jumps over gaps and hits blocks to destroy them to progress. This is a major departure from the original game. There's a top-down map view as well.

Basic fighting consists of using your shield to ward off attacks and your sword to inflict damage. You can learn eight types of magic: shield, life, jump, fairy, fire, reflect, spell, and thunder. These will enable you to do such things as fly, cast eerie spells, throw fireballs, increase your jumping power, and recover life points. In addition, you can find magic jars, which recover your magic points; dolls, which give you extra lives; and rafts, which enable you to cross the sea. Although not as widely praised as *The Legend of Zelda* (in fact many criticize the game for its differences, most notably the switch to sideview perspective), *Zelda II* remains a classic in its own right.

©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Notable Quotable:

"Clearly intended to be a more advanced game. As sometimes happens with sequels it is, alas, inferior to its predecessor, though still lots of fun. The graphics and sounds are perfectly reasonable . . . A would-be Link warrior can get into action right away, without worrying about reading the manual." —*Dragon* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The game retains all the wonder and play value of *The Legend of Zelda* without simply rehashing that game. There are a lot of new twists, all of them imaginative and all of them daunting, and the magical elements are more pronounced and important. Even though some of the technical aspects of the game are less than perfect, the challenge more than makes up for that." —*How to Win at Nintendo Games 4* (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"I enjoyed the music in *Zelda II*. It has an urgent quality about it that fits well with the game. The sound effects are pretty standard, with the exception of the 'fwing' that Link's sword makes when it's thrown. The graphics have come a long way since the release of the original *Legend of Zelda*. Instead of looking like Munchkins, Link and his adversaries are much more realistic . . . an extremely challenging game . . . outstanding play value. It's an excellent adventure that will give most gamers weeks of fine play." —*Compute!'s Guide to Nintendo Games* (Compute! Books, 1989)

Notable Quotable:

"Although much, much different than its ancestor, *Zelda II* still provides an enjoyable gameplay experience . . . the graphics are superb . . . Enemies and characters alike are well drawn and contain surprising levels of detail . . . The weakest link (pardon the pun) in the game would be the story, consisting of your standard save-the-princess tale mixed with a nearly unused escape-the-forces-of-darkness element that could have made the game much more interesting . . . Fortunately the game's intricate battles more than made up for the story's pathetic performance . . . *Zelda II* was pushed aside simply because it was something that no one expected. In actuality it was a great game that gave you a nasty challenge while still proving to be entertaining." —RPGFan (www.rpgfan.com)

Insider Insight: *Zelda II* will forever remain one of my favorite NES games. I even prefer it over the original *Legend of Zelda* in most categories, including music, gameplay, and design, but another large factor is the relationship between my father and I. I was glued to my NES as a kid, but the rest of my family enjoyed it as well, especially my dad—he's a big fan of grinding in RPG or RPG-like games. He's never been great at jumping, however, and oftentimes when playing platformers he'd have me help him get past those obstacles. With *Zelda II* this worked for both of us. I'd play and progress through the game as my dad watched, then, while I was at school, he'd level up Link for me. Needless to say, by the end of the game Link was maxed out and helped make that final stretch of the game a bit more bearable. We also plotted out a map of the Great Palace so we could finally conquer the game. This is one of my earlier and most cherished gaming memories and a particularly fond memory of my dad. It was in these cases where he fostered my love of video games and played a large role in me being the gaming fanatic I am today, and *Zelda II* was an important piece of that. —Joshua L. Olson, a.k.a. Church—The Game Grinder on YouTube

Insider Insight: The original *Legend of Zelda* is my close favorite of the two NES titles in the series, but I have always retained a soft spot for *The Adventure of Link*, and not just for its incredible gameplay. Just prior to entering sixth grade in 1989, I attended a month-long sleep-away summer camp in the mountains of North Carolina. Family members had previously attended and loved it and I wanted to give it a try.

I was used to spending summers relatively unstructured (i.e. countless hours roaming the neighborhood with friends, playing sports and video games), so it was quite an adjustment to do supervised, time-blocked activities all day long, from meals, to cabin time, to athletic pursuits. Perhaps the most grating of all were our daily instructional swim lessons, which required us to complete numerous laps around the pool before free swimming could begin.

Faced with this aquatic boredom while pining for the recently released *Zelda II* (which I couldn't play until returning home—no NES at camp), I would motivate myself in the pool by pretending that I was Link, actively questing inside the game. Each and every lap, by reaching the pool's end I would achieve the next objective—attaining a heart container, discovering the hammer, clearing a palace, or whatever else I came up with. A little silly? Of course. But to my eleven-year-old self it worked incredibly well—those swim laps went by in no time, and I even began to look forward to them.

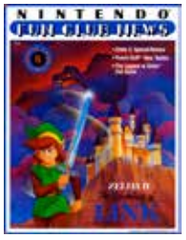
Three decades later I started swimming laps again for exercise. Unsurprisingly it feels monotonous as ever, and one day in the pool I thought back to my childhood *Zelda* imagining and pondered, can this actually still work? And, while this is probably the geekiest thing I have ever written, the answer remains a wholehearted yes! I don't envision it all the time in the pool, or even most of the time, but when I need that extra kick to reach the end Link still delivers the goods. Gotta love it! —Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

Insider Insight: *The Legend of Zelda* is a hard act to follow so *Zelda II* had the odds stacked against it from the start. It featured a completely different play style than its predecessor, early escalating difficulty, and sometimes cryptic dialog—all of which lead to giving people mixed feelings upon the game's release. Nintendo's decision to make the following entry, *A Link to the Past* for the SNES—an overhead view like the first game—all but solidified that being the standard of what a Zelda game should be. This only further sullied *Zelda II* in the minds of many as a game that was "too difficult" or "too hard" to be a noteworthy entry to the series. I fell victim to that mentality as well—until I actually sat down, gave it a solid chance, and played it all the way through.

This game is tough to get started, as it does indeed have a steep difficulty curve, but once I settled into the gameplay I really got into it. Everything just sort of "clicked" for me, and all of a sudden I was having a lot of fun. The music is absolutely classic and really kept me motivated to play, even when things got frustrating. These are tunes that will stick with me for a long time. I find myself whistling the overworld theme or the Great Palace theme more often than I should probably admit. I also enjoyed the different spells you get from the various wise men. Some of these are useful, like life and shield; others like fire are cool, but you won't likely get much use out of it as you try to conserve your magic meter.

The RPG elements are a little heavy here by *Zelda* standards, with things like overworld battle sequences and a leveling system. These for the most part work really well, and fighting enemies not only gets you experience points, but also gets you better familiarized with the combat system, which is essential in later parts of the game. The bosses are memorable and fun to fight and some of the items are cool, like the gloves that let you break blocks with your sword. The coolest offering in this game, though, is easily the down-stab skill, which lets you attack downward while in the air. Bouncing from enemy to enemy with the down-stab is an extremely satisfying experience.

Looking back to when I was a kid, I remember playing the original *Legend of Zelda*, and I remember being aware of *Zelda II* via *Nintendo Power*, but I don't remember actually playing it until I was around 13 or so. Adult me is a bit disappointed younger me would be so quick to disregard such a great game without giving it a proper chance, but I'm glad I eventually came around and played it, allowing myself to enjoy it for what it is—a unique but wonderful entry in the *Legend of Zelda* series. If you passed on it years ago give it a try—you'll be glad you did. —Danny Mattice, YouTube and Twitch personality



Zen: Intergalactic Ninja

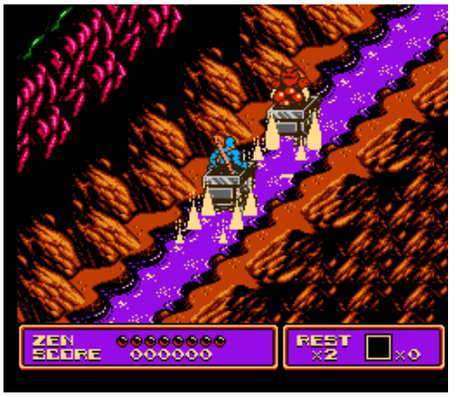
PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

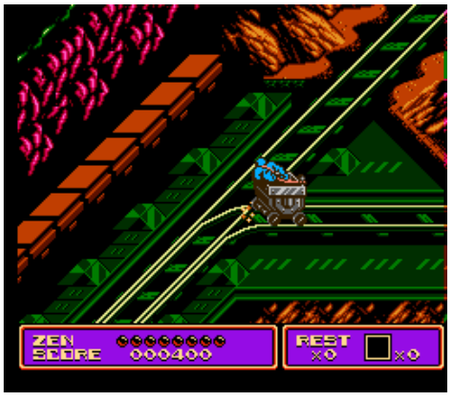
Based on a comic book character created in 1987, *Zen: Intergalactic Ninja* is one of several environmentally aware NES games, along with such titles as *Captain Planet* and *Toxic Crusaders*. As the titular do-gooder you can run, jump, crouch, hang from branches and pipes, and use a photon stick to jab enemies (including midair attacks). Four selectable stages are available at the beginning: Acid Rain Forest, Slixxon Oil Rig, Biggs Toxic Factory, and Runaway Railcar. Various stages follow, including The Cavern of Crud, The Cesspool, Scrap Heap's Haven, The Imposter's Hideout, and Lord Contanimous' Shrine. You'll extinguish fires, rescue workers, climb walls and stairs, revive flowers with the stick, leap on perilous platforms, ride a mine cart that jumps over gaps and other obstacles, and battle such baddies as Sulfura, Oil Slick, Smogger, Garbageman, and Lord Contaminous. Some areas scroll at an angle (isometric perspective), while others move vertically or horizontally. There are also bonus stages where you catch recyclable materials and toss them into the Recyclotron to re-create allies Lawn Ranger, Pulp, Bottle Bandit, Can-It, and Lights-Out, each of whom provides a bonus item, such as a shield, points, or an extra life.

Memories: During the late '80s and early '90s, when Zen the Intergalactic Ninja had his brief time in the spotlight (there was a cartoon and toy line), I was a manager at Lone Star Comics and then a co-owner of Fantastic Comics & Cards. For whatever reason the character never really got my attention, and I never read a single one of the comic books. I do remember, however, being glad the property was in good hands with Konami, one of my favorite video game companies.

Notable Quotable:
"This is the culmination of everything [Konami] did. The game just runs so perfectly. It looks beautiful. The music is fantastic, some of the best for the NES . . . You don't really hear a whole lot of people talk about this game . . . I highly suggest playing this." —RewindMike (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"As amazing as the title sounds Konami gets a few things wrong here, as Zen spends more time rescuing firemen and sorting his recyclables than beating toxic waste dumps and contaminated rivers to death with his big, manly Photon Stick . . . whether he's bringing flowers back to life in the rainforest or racing mine cars, Zen does it to the throbbing beat of a soundtrack that kicks almost as much ass as he does . . . an ideal example of how to treat a licensed property." —Michael Crisman (retrogamingmagazine.com)

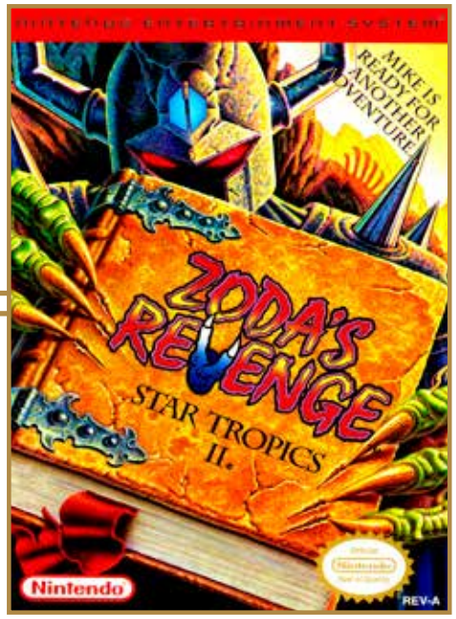




© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Zoda's Revenge: StarTropics II

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D3.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.



The last NES-exclusive Nintendo game, *Zoda's Revenge* sticks to the basic gameplay of the original *StarTropics*: overhead view puzzle solving and dungeon-based monster action where you run, jump, and attack enemies inside caves, tunnels, and buildings. However, this sequel has better graphics and equips Mike with an axe instead of a yo-yo. Other new weapons and items include a dagger, a katana, shockwaves, and a flute (for charming snakes), among others. The adventure takes Mike, who can now move and fire diagonally and turn around more quickly, on a nine-chapter trip through time, where he will visit such locales as Egypt, London, Italy, and Transylvania and interact with such figures as Cleopatra, Sherlock Holmes, and Leonardo da Vinci. He'll also encounter a nice variety of enemy types, including Mini and Max Mummy, Wild Boar, Snowman, Monster Mask, Skull Bug, Knight Rider (a knight on a horse), and Mashing Miner (a skeleton with a large hammer). Jumping on tiles that act as platforms and that reveal doors and switches plays a pivotal role in the action.

Notable Quotable:

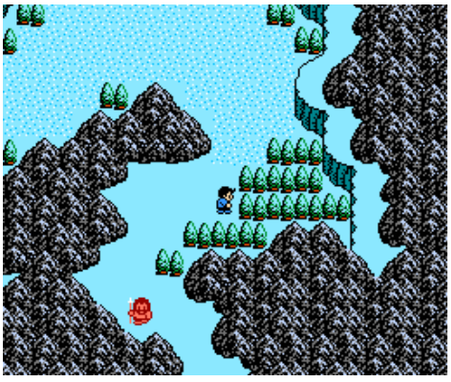
"*Zoda's Revenge* is a big game with an overhead view, plenty of action and items. The problem is this game really doesn't stand out and is too little too late for a dated system. However, if you liked the first one . . . " —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Absurd difficulty due to horribly choppy control and maneuvering . . . The story is quite cheesy but enjoyable . . . The ending surprised . . . Graphics are detailed but jagged. Some areas are brightly colored and others are quite drab . . . an awful lot of flicker . . . cinema scenes are excellent . . . music fits the mood of the game . . . core gameplay is good and versatile . . . but the control is so sluggish and choppy that I even screamed at the game." —Doug Jackson (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

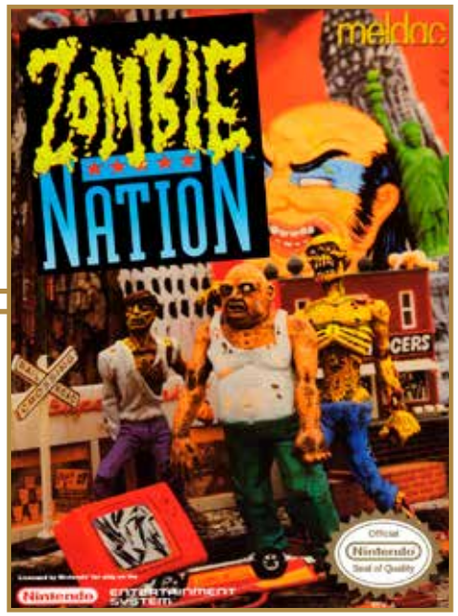
"To give you plenty of detective work the game manual provides a bare minimum of info and the story unfolds as you play. The graphics are an improvement over the game's predecessor, featuring larger characters and plenty of color. However, a fair amount of glitching still pops up when you have a bunch of characters onscreen simultaneously. It's an occasional reminder that the NES is older technology, but it doesn't interfere with the game much. The sound supplements the action with vivid effects and mood setting tunes . . . Where the game doesn't fare as well is the control department, though it's also an improvement. *Star Tropics II* adds diagonal movement, but it's sometimes hard to use; other times you'll want to go straight, but you'll wander off at an angle—probably into a hazard. Also Mike has molasses in his boots, so don't count on getting him where you want him to go quickly. From the start of your trek to Zoda's defeat you're challenged to solve mind-bending and thumb-busting puzzles. Nintendo has put a good mix together and shown NES owners that the system isn't finished yet." —*GamePro* (July 1994)



©SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Zombie Nation

PUBLISHER: Meldac.
DEVELOPER: KAZe/Live Planning.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



Players control the disembodied holographic head of a Samurai as it travels through four nicely illustrated levels, each ending in a boss: New York City (Head of Medusa), The Grand Canyon (Atlas), The Oil Fields of Texas (Nuclear Plant), and The Underground Caverns of the North Central U.S. (Venusian Snakes). You fire straight projectiles from the head's eyes and arching projectiles from his mouth to kill such enemies as zombies (of course), tanks, helicopters, zeppelins, jet fighters, drone robots, water snakes, and lava monsters, as well as to destroy buildings and mountains in the head's path. By rescuing zombie hostages that are hurled through the air you can power up the head with double fire, triple fire, and smart bombs. *Zombie Nation* is weird, but fast, frenetic, and fun, with constant action and shooting. This is a noisy, thunderous game that, like many NES titles, is difficult to finish. And strangely enough, it is one of three NES games with an animated Statue of Liberty, the others being *Ghostbusters II* and *Superman*.

Notable Quotable:

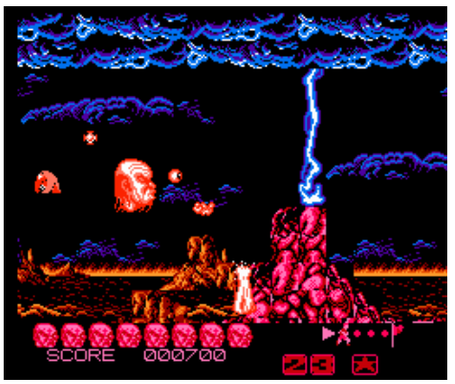
"When I first encountered *Zombie Nation* it was love at first sight: the disembodied head of a samurai destroying buildings with what appears to be vomit? Yes, please! Perhaps the NES's only intentional B-game, *Zombie Nation* is actually pretty fun and always good for a laugh." —Sam Claiborn (www.ign.com), IGN Game Help Associate Editor

Notable Quotable:

"The degree of destruction you can unleash is truly awesome as you obliterate buildings that instantly go up in flames. Even the game itself struggles to keep up with the carnage, causing your head to flicker badly as a consequence. Take extra care to avoid the laser beams, which pretty much drain your entire life bar. Even those that appear to be in the distance are deadly. The graphics—especially the city skylines—look pretty spectacular. You only get one life, and novice players will find themselves staring at 'game over' after just 5 or 10 seconds . . . *Zombie Nation* really took me by surprise. This shooter is so weird, crazy, and downright stupid that I can't get enough of it." —Dave Mrozek (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight: Zombies are all the rage these days, from *The Walking Dead* to the *Dawn of the Dead* remakes and beyond. However, the walking corpse has been in the braaaaaaains of media fans for decades thanks to George Romero's 1968 seminal classic *Night of the Living Dead*, which popularized the genre. I've always been fascinated by video games that instill fear so I had to pick up the late-era NES game *Zombie Nation* the moment I saw the box art featuring a trio of shambling corpses.

The story for the game tells of a meteor crashing on Earth and transforming the US population into zombies. During the intro you learn that a samurai clan head is traveling to the US to stop the entity. I was shocked when it was quite literally a floating samurai head that shot eyeballs to stop his foes. However, I was disappointed when I realized that zombies only played a small part in the game, as it's a side-scrolling shooter in the vein of *Abadox* and *Life Force*. Once I got past that I discovered a fun and campy, though brutally difficult game. One highlight is defending yourself from a giant Statue of Liberty with snakes on its head. If you can make it there you'll see that the ending is vaguely reminiscent of the film *Team America: World Police* (2004) with its overt patriotism. —Chris Leathco, blogger at Retro Gaming Roundup, author of *Afterglow* and *The Virtual Boy Game Library*



© SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Everything I Needed to Know, I Learned from the NES

by Shane Stein

Everything I needed to know, I learned from the NES. An exaggeration? Well, yes, of course. But surprisingly enough, and perhaps to the chagrin of 1980s parents everywhere, Nintendo games genuinely did teach us far more about the broader world than we probably ever realized. We just simply needed to pay attention.

Today, we take for granted that the world's information is readily available at our fingertips. Prior to the internet, however, the average American kid had dramatically less access and exposure to most of the globe's peoples, history, news, entertainment, and far more. Sure, we learned a decent amount in school, through parents and friends, and from books, movies, and magazines. But widespread accessible information on any given topic was virtually nil compared to the present. Need, for example, to research Japanese history for that term paper? These days, of course, we Google it. Back then—head to the library and spend hours finding that one book you need among a stack of thousands. Hope you know your Dewey Decimal system, and hush your voice around the librarian.

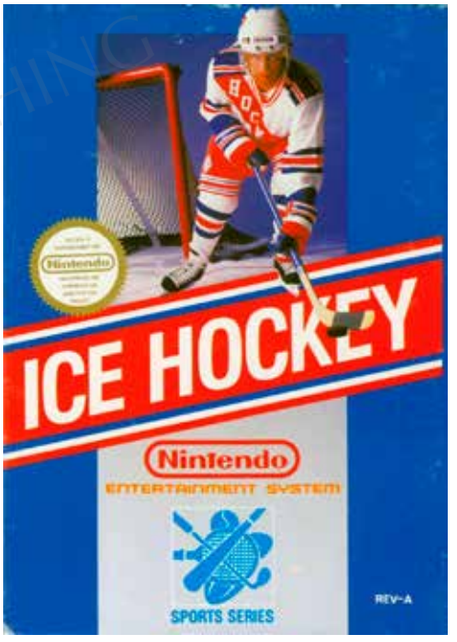
Fascinatingly, though, significant knowledge of the world outside our immediate childhood surroundings could be gleaned from, of all sources, the Nintendo Entertainment System and its games. How can this be, you might ask? Obviously it wasn't remotely comparable to today's internet. But the vast NES oeuvre, encompassing a substantial array of game genres and categories, truly provided a slice of worldly education.

Want to learn about a new sport, for instance? Growing up in Texas I played endless amounts of baseball, basketball, football, and soccer. But never ice hockey—indeed, I never even learned to properly skate, much less chase a puck. Hockey was little more than an abstract notion to most of us raised south of the Mason-Dixon line. And yet, thanks to *Ice Hockey* on the NES, I learned the game's rules so well I could even describe "icing" from the referee's perspective. (I also learned that video hockey players came in three categories: big/slow, medium, and fast/skinny—but that's a whole other story!)

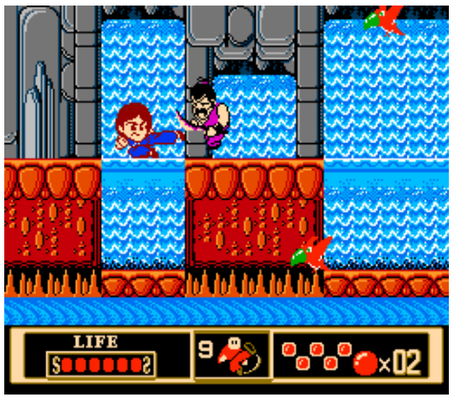
How about golf and skateboarding, two other pastimes I rarely experienced in person? *Golf* on the NES taught me not only that Mario favors the links, but also the fundamentals of club selection and calculating wind speed's effect on the ball. *Skate or Die*, meanwhile, imparted an entire skating culture's milieu and lingo, from freestyle to downhill jams to ollies and rail slides. Eventually I did pick up golf as a teenager, and the NES experience most certainly assisted with my development. I never ultimately pursued skateboarding, but at least I was no longer clueless when it came up in conversation.

Okay, so those are just fun and games. How about more-serious topics, like politics and history? For modern lessons on the Cold War, try *Rush'n Attack* and *Golgo 13: Top Secret Episode*. The thinly veiled title of the former was a genuine concern until the 1989 Berlin Wall collapse, and the player starred as a singular US soldier, armed initially with only a knife and yet aiming to infiltrate and bring down the Soviet superpower (Echoes of Schwarzenegger and Stallone movies, anyone?). The latter game, meanwhile, whisked players all around the world in an espionage battle between the CIA, KGB, and other intelligence agencies. Exotic locales included Berlin, Athens, Rio de Janeiro, and even Antarctica. How many American kids learned in school about Berlin's Tegel Airport, Potsdam Station, and Spree River, or about Athens' Parthenon, Theater of Dionysius, and Herodes Concert Hall? Those of us who played *Golgo 13* were in the know.

What about East Asian culture, you might ask, of which Americans regularly encounter today but back then hardly experienced? Years before ever hearing of sushi or watching Ichiro play baseball, I ascertained plenty from the games *Kid Niki*, *Flying Dragon: The Secret Scroll*, and *The Legend of Kage*. Broader America first learned of Jackie Chan upon his first US-marketed film, 1996's *Rumble in the Bronx*.



SCHIFFER PUBLISHING



But NES gamers had known his exploits for years thanks to *Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu*. Obviously these brushes with East Asia were mere bucket drops compared to actually living there, but for many kids in the States, the NES is truly the closest we got.

And how about reading comprehension, something the NES certainly was accused of pushing kids away from? Besides *Nintendo Power*, which millions of us consumed, try some of the games' instruction booklets. The stories behind *Dragon Warrior*, *Faxanadu*, and *Final Fantasy* come across as thrilling as any young-adult fantasy novel. Indeed, Nintendo even seemed to recognize this, licensing their name to the "Worlds of Power" novelization series for *Metal Gear*, *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest*, *Ninja Gaiden*, and others.

Interested in robotics? *Mega Man* and its sequels may have been light-years ahead of reality, but the titular robot hero and his exploits surely inspired plenty of budding scientists. And how many kids, fascinated by the stealth military strategy of *Metal Gear, Jackal*, *Commando*, and others, perhaps received their initial inspiration to join the US Armed Forces and defend America? (If you think this is a reach, look no further than *Star Trek*, which inspired countless young people to pursue careers in science, engineering, and astronautics.)

Even games without ostensibly thematic connections to certain topics could still impart their wisdom. *The Legend of Zelda* is by no means about animals per se, but I first heard of sea urchins thanks to its enemy character Digdogger. Nor did I realize a boxing match could end without a knockdown until encountering the Win by TKO in *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* And who could have imagined learning about celebrities—Iggy Pop, Morton Downey Jr., Lemmy from Motorhead, and Beethoven among them—through *Super Mario Bros. 3*'s Koopaling characters? (Seeing *SMB 3*'s Beethoven knock-off was almost as cool as watching him rock out in the movie *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*!)

And the list goes on. We're really just scratching the surface of what the NES exposed us to, and it's almost impossible not to learn something new simply by firing up the controller. With such an expansive variety of games, both American made and globally produced, in-house as well as third party, from individual and team sports to action and adventure, puzzles and strategy, science and military, fantasy and RPG, arcade and crime fighting, light gun and power pad, and so much more, Nintendo truly had it covered.

Today, we of course live in a far more advanced digital world. The phones in our hands literally carry more processing power than the supercomputers of the 1980s. We are effectively one click (or voice command) away from most any information, and we are far advantaged for it. But a modicum of interesting and practical knowledge nonetheless remains available through the NES, if only we choose to explore it. In the spirit of education along with entertainment, here's to retro NES gaming far into the future!

—Shane Stein, executive producer of *The Game Chasers Movie*

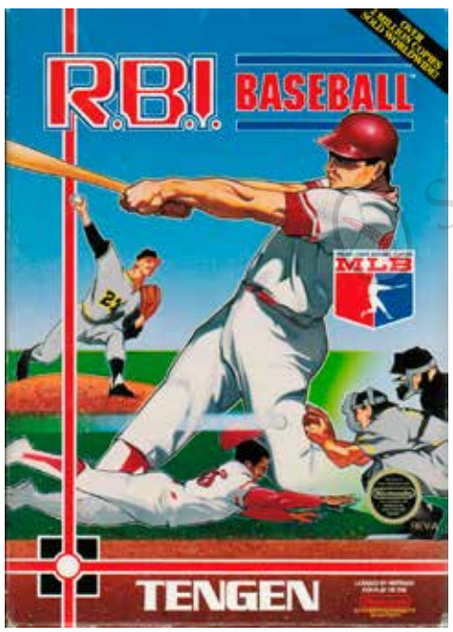
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

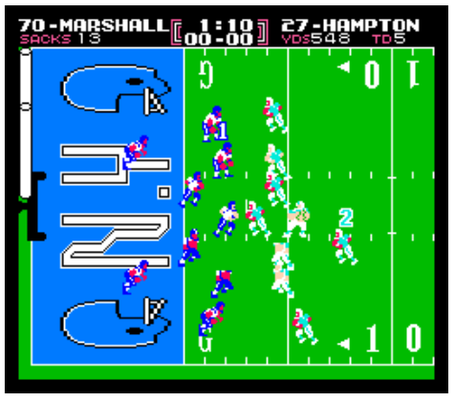
Sports Games of the NES

by Patrick Hickey Jr.

I was born in 1983. That makes me too young to truly appreciate the Atari 2600 or the Intellivision, but the perfect age to revel in the awesomeness of the Nintendo Entertainment System. Since its birth the "Nintendo," as we called it back then because there was no other console available in the US from the company at the time, has always been in my home. In fact, while I write this, an NES top loader is in my peripheral vision, with a copy of *Ice Hockey* comfortably nestled in the cartridge slot.

As the owner of more than 3,000 games and 30 consoles, why would I still be so affectionate toward an 8-bit system that is now more than 35 years old? It's simple, really. Because many of the games are timeless. For me, it's the sports games in particular that hold up remarkably well, and those games are the ones I come back to the most. *R.B.I. Baseball*, *Tecmo Bowl*, *Ice Hockey*, *Double Dribble*, *Side Pocket*, and *Pro Wrestling*, among several others, remain as some of the most enjoyable games ever released in their respective genres. And to this day, these are games that I still play on my lunch breaks or late at night when I need some "me" time. Although the visuals in these games have faded into obsoletion, the gameplay variety and entertainment value they possess are tried and true. These games, again, are timeless.





I'd be lying if nostalgia didn't play a role in this sentiment, however—these cartridges were my first loves in gaming. They were like that hot girl that walks down the stairs in her prom dress in every teen romantic comedy. You never forget them. But it's more. What these games did was set the standard for the sports titles that followed. *R.B.I. Baseball* gave console gamers real players, with real attributes. That was huge. It changed baseball video games forever. *Tecmo Bowl* did the same thing with football. While games like *10-Yard Fight* and *Play Action Football* were a ton of fun on the NES, *Tecmo Bowl* was better automatically because those games lacked the NFL Player's Association license.

To play a sports video game well was one thing, but to give the player the feeling that they were playing with and against their favorite, and most hated, players, that was a dream fulfilled. To this day, nothing makes me happier than to play a game of *NHL 2020* against the New York Rangers and utterly destroy them. That whole notion for me began with *R.B.I. Baseball* on the NES, where I'd take the New York Mets and beat on the Houston Astros every morning before I headed off to elementary school.

A few years later *R.B.I. Baseball II* took it to another level with every team in the Major Leagues, and now, the baseball card–collecting, almanac-reading, batting-average-remembering nut job I was becoming could get a fix of a different kind on his home gaming console. To be able to do all of this with just a d-pad, two action buttons, no downloadable content, and no online play is a testament to what master achievements those games were.

And while my Nintendo Entertainment System would be outdone from a technical standpoint by the Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis (my later system of choice because of its superior collection of sports titles), PlayStation, and so forth, I've never forgotten how those NES games made me feel. So much so that when my nephews and now my daughter want to play games, I take them to that console first. My youngest nephew is 11, and the dual-stick control of *NHL 2020* is tricky for him (and other gamers I know), but the kid loves *Ice Hockey* and *Blades of Steel*. Why? Do I have to say it again? Because the games are timeless. The fact that many of these games have been added to Nintendo's online service via the Switch only makes it easier for me to have fun with the younger generation and reconnect with my childhood without hooking up a CRT TV.

While games the likes of *Super Mario Bros.*, *Metroid*, and *The Legend of Zelda* put Nintendo in the driver's seat and made them the leader in the industry during the 8-bit era, you cannot overlook the importance of the console's sports games. Without the innovation of the titles I fawned over previously, the Sega Master System, the NES's closest thing to a rival, may have looked a lot sexier to a potential console owner. Nothing against that console (which I own and love, by the way), but how many landmark sports titles does the SMS have? Exactly.

At the end of the day, the sports titles of the NES era changed the industry forever and made the ultrarealistic, deep, and fun titles today the likes of *The Show*, *NBA 2K*, and Madden possible.

– Patrick Hickey Jr. is the author of *The Minds Behind the Games* book series and is a full time Lecturer of English and Assistant Director of the Journalism program at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York

SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Appendix 1
PAL-Exclusive NES Games

These are licensed games that were exclusive to PAL regions of the world, including European countries. PAL stands for Phase Alternating Line, which is the television standard typically used in those regions. (North America uses NTSC, which is short for National Television System Committee.) Games that are virtually identical to North American releases except for a title change and maybe some minor graphical alterations, such as *Probotector* (*Contra*), aren't included here.

ALADDIN
PUBLISHER: Virgin Interactive.
DEVELOPER: NMS Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.
On a quest to rescue Princess Jasmine from Jafar you, as Aladdin, must run, jump, and otherwise work your way through settings from Disney's 1992 movie. Aladdin attacks enemies with a scimitar and can also throw apples at them.

ASTERIX
PUBLISHER: Infogrames.
DEVELOPER: Bit Managers.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.
Guide the diminutive, mustachioed Gaul as he journeys through Europe, battling animals and Romans while on a quest to rescue his friend Obelix. Set in 50 BC and based on the comic book series of the same name.

AUSSIE RULES FOOTY
PUBLISHER: Laser Beam.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Australian Football; 1–6 players (2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.
Australian football where you can play an exhibition match or a full season against 17 other teams. The elevated view is from the side and scrolls to follow the action.

BANANA PRINCE
PUBLISHER: Takara.
DEVELOPER: KID.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.
As the Banana Prince you must retrieve the stolen weapons of your island home. You'll collect flower tokens, battle odd enemies, gamble, buy weapons, use seeds to grow flowers that let you reach high places, and more.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: Probe Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.
Based on Disney's 1991 film, this game casts you as Beast, who runs, jumps, punches bats and spiders, avoids traps, and much more, all in an attempt to rescue Belle from Gaston. Lumière lights the way in dark passages.

CHAMPIONSHIP RALLY
PUBLISHER: HAL Laboratory.
DEVELOPER: Human Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Off-Road Racing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.
Top-down racing with an isometric perspective. Includes track and weather conditions, a variety of courses, and car customization: engines, tire tread, and two- or four-wheel drive.

LES CHEVALIERS DU ZODIAQUE: LA LEGENDE D'OR (THE KNIGHTS OF THE ZODIAC: THE GOLDEN LEGEND)
PUBLISHER: Bandai/
DEVELOPER: Hect/TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Adventure/Turn-Based Role-Playing Game.
YEAR: 1987.
Unleash standard and charged attacks in turn-based battles in this RPG based on the manga *Saint Seiya*. You'll need to be able to read French to fully appreciate this game.

CRACKOUT
PUBLISHER: Palcom Software.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Ball-and-Paddle; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.
Guide a paddle/ship along the bottom of the screen, rebounding a bouncing ball into play (without letting it get past you) to destroy colored blocks. Clearly inspired by *Breakout*, the game also resembles *Arkanoid*, since it has enemies that drop power-ups when hit. There are bosses as well.

DEVIL WORLD
PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1.
GAME TYPE: Maze; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1987.
Shigeru Miyamoto's first console-only game, *Devil World* has players guiding a green dragon through a *Pac-Man*-style maze, avoiding monsters. Touching crosses powers up the dragon so it can eat dots in the maze and breathe fire.

DROPZONE
PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Eurocom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.
Guide a jet pack–wearing hero as he flies over a wraparound planet, firing left and right at aliens who capture scientists walking along the ground. Destroy the enemies while catching the falling scientists. Plays a lot like the coin-op classic *Defender*.

ELITE
PUBLISHER: Imagineer.
DEVELOPER: David Braben/Ian Bell.
GAME TYPE: Space Combat Simulator; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.
Based on the PC title, *Elite* has you engaging in space battle, upgrading your ship's weapons and powers, taking on military contracts, and trading goods to earn cash. The game sports a wire frame 3-D perspective.

FORMULA 1 SENSATION
PUBLISHER: Palcom Software.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Formula-1 Racing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.
Viewed from behind your car, *Formula 1 Sensation* has you speeding down twisting, turning streets, racing to beat other cars. The bottom third of the screen is the instrument panel displaying speed, RPMs, a top-down map, and the like. Includes famous racers (Ayrton Senna, Nigel Mansell, and others), pit stops, and customizable brakes, engines, and tires.

HAMMERIN' HARRY
PUBLISHER: Irem.
DEVELOPER: Irem.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.
The Rusty Nailers destroy Harry's house in the town of Carpentersville, sending you, as Harry, on a rampage. You battle baddies by smashing them or pounding the ground, the latter of which sends shock waves in both directions. Environments include construction sites, sewers, a ship, and a mansion.

INTERNATIONAL CRICKET
PUBLISHER: Laser Beam Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Cricket; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Select from eight teams in *International Cricket*: Australia, England, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and West Indies. Play a single game or World Series, where you select a squad and challenge the other seven teams. Other options include team color, Practice mode, music on or off, number of "overs," "bounce cross" enabled or disabled, and more. The battling screen offers a third person view while the game changes to top-down after the ball is hit into play.

KICK OFF
PUBLISHER: Imagineer.
DEVELOPER: Enigma Variations.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.
Top-down, vertically scrolling soccer featuring eight European international teams. You can play a single game, enter league play, or simply practice such moves as corner kicks, passing, sliding tackles, and dribbling. Each player differs according to such attributes as accuracy, aggression, pace, and stamina.

KONAMI HYPER SOCCER
PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.
Party of the Hyper Sports series, this top-down, horizontal game lets you play Tournament soccer or a single game via Demonstration mode. Each of the 24 teams you can select from has assignable skill points in the following attributes: speed, offense, defense, kick, technique, and luck. Includes throw-ins, corner kicks, penalty kicks and, of course, goal kicks.

THE LEGEND OF PRINCE VALIANT
PUBLISHER: Ocean Software.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.
As the classic comic strip character Prince Valiant, you use throwing daggers to battle bad guys, as well as dragons and other mythological beasts. As with many platformers you can duck and swing on vines, and of course you will jump over obstacles, but the game, which is based on the cartoon of the same name, also includes two first-person stages: bow-and-arrow and firing cannons at ships.

THE LION KING
PUBLISHER: Virgin Interactive.
DEVELOPER: Westwood Studios.

© JEFFERSON CHRISTIE

GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.
The Lion King, which is based on the 1994 Disney film, lets gamers play as a young Simba who can jump over obstacles and on enemies, including bugs, spiders, and lizards. Simba can also roar to stun enemies and roll along the ground. The top-down, side-scrolling stampede stage mixes things up a bit. The Super Nintendo levels where you play as a fully grown Simba are missing from the NES version.

MR. GIMMICK
PUBLISHER: Sunsoft.
DEVELOPER: Sunsoft.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.
Take control of Mr. Gimmick, a green doll come to life who is armed with a cosmic star. This weapon helps you destroy enemies, go over obstacles, and reach otherwise unobtainable levels and hidden areas. Enemies can become allies, and there are many hidden items to find in this cute platformer.

NEW GHOSTBUSTERS II
PUBLISHER: Hal Laboratory.
DEVELOPER: Hal Laboratory.
GAME TYPE: Top-Down Action; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.
Play as Peter, Ray, Egon, Winston, or the lesser-known Louis in this top-down take on the classic horror comedy. You walk around using the proton pack to zap ghosts while a computer-controlled Buster follows and captures them with a ghost trap. There are six levels of play: The Courthouse, Subways, Apartment, The Underground, The Museum of Art, and Vigo's Altar.

NOAH'S ARK
PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Source Research and Development.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.
Based on the Bible story found in the book of Genesis, this game puts you in the title role of Noah, whom God has commanded to put two of every type of animal on his ark to save them from drowning in the great flood. Sporting a long white beard and balding head, Noah must visit a variety of locations to retrieve the animals, running, jumping, ducking, and firing projectiles at enemies as he goes.

OVER HORIZON
PUBLISHER: Hot-B.
DEVELOPER: Hot-B/Pixel.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.
This *R-Type*-style horizontal shooter has players guiding a spaceship through an assortment of levels, firing away at enemy vessels, gun emplacements, and alien creatures. Certain destroyed enemies drop power-ups, including lasers, bombs, and homing missiles. You can also acquire bots that follow your ship and fire at enemies.

PARASOL STARS: RAINBOW ISLANDS II
PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Non-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.
This sequel to *Rainbow Islands* finds Bubby walking and jumping around platforms on single-screen stages, using his umbrella to scoop up items and enemies and throw them at such foes as turtles, seahorses, unicorns, and little airplanes. For extra firepower you can collect water droplets to charge up your attack. In some stages the action scrolls a bit left and right. Includes appearances of characters from other Taito games.

PARODIUS
PUBLISHER: Palcom Software.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.
In this "cute-'em-up," which is a parody of sorts of *Gradius*, you select from four flying characters to control, each with different attack methods. You can upgrade said attacks by grabbing capsules you can store in inventory. There are seven stages, each with a boss at the end.

RACKETS & RIVALS
PUBLISHER: Palcom Software.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Tennis; 1-4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.
This alliterative tennis game lets you practice, play an Exhibition match, and enter a Tournament. You can serve, hit volleys, lob the ball, select from three court surfaces, select the number of sets, and play singles and doubles. You can even complain to the referee!

RAINBOW ISLANDS
PUBLISHER: Ocean Software.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Platformer; 1 or 2 players
YEAR: 1992
In this sequel to *Bubble Bobble* Bub and Bob, who are now small boys, use their ability to cast rainbows to trap and defeat enemies. In addition to acting as weaponry, the rainbows are platforms for climbing and jumping on so our heroes can progress vertically through the stages. You can collect food and power-ups, but don't dawdle, because rising water acts as a time limit. There are seven worlds, each with a boss.

ROAD FIGHTER
PUBLISHER: Palcom Software.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Sportscar Racing; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.
Road Fighter has a top-down view like *Spy Hunter*, but you can't shoot other cars. It is a simple driving game as you race to the finish line before times runs out. You can pick up fuel, but be careful to avoid cars, trucks, oil splotches, and crashing into walls.

RODLAND
PUBLISHER: Storm.
DEVELOPER: The Sales Curve.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.
In this arcade-like game you guide Tam or Rit as they work their way through 40 screens on a mission to rescue their mom. As you climb ladders and walk on platforms you'll defeat baddies by flipping them from side to side with your magic wand. You can also use the wand to create ladders. Collecting fruit lets you enter a bonus game.

DIE SCHLÜMPFE (THE SMURFS)
PUBLISHER: Infogrames.
DEVELOPER: Bit Managers.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.
Hop on hedgehogs, fish, dragonflies, butterflies, and other enemies in this charming side-scroller. The nefarious Gargamel has kidnapped a trio of Smurfs and you must rescue your captured cohorts. During your quest, which takes you through such areas as forests, mines, mountains, and swamps, the standard platforming action will give way to the Smurf you control riding a log (down a river), a mine cart, storks, and a sled. There are bonus levels as well.

SUPER MARIO BROS./ TETRIS/NINTENDO WORLD CUP
PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo/Technōs Japan.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/ Action Puzzle/Sports/Soccer; 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.
Select from three diverse, previously released games in this compilation cart. From a menu screen you can choose to play *Super Mario Bros.*, *Tetris*, or *Nintendo World Cup*. For more info on each title, check out the individual write-ups in the main section of this book.

SUPER TURRICAN
PUBLISHER: Imagineer.
DEVELOPER: Rainbow Arts Software.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter; 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.
Incorporating certain levels from *Turrican* and *Turrican II*, as well as featuring some unique areas, *Super Turrican* has you running and gunning for your life, using three upgradable weapons to battle enemies: laser, rebound (ricocheting shots), and multiple (spread shot). There are bombs and shields as well.

TECMO WORLD CUP SOCCER
PUBLISHER: Tecmo.
DEVELOPER: Tecmo.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.
Based on the *Tehkan World Cup* coin-op, *Tecmo World Cup* lets you select from 16 international teams for overhead vertical soccer action. World Cup is the only mode available, with you challenging the computer or a friend. You can perform such basic maneuvers as passing, shooting, and slide tackling in this simple soccer sim, and you can use passwords to save your tournament progress.

TROLLS IN CRAZYLAND
PUBLISHER: American Softworks.
DEVELOPER: KID.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.
Trolls in Crazyland is a reskinned version of *Doki! Doki! Yuenchi* for the Famicom. Players guide a Troll doll as he runs, jumps, and otherwise journeys through an amusement park, kicking a soccer ball at such enemies as clowns, monkeys, and boomerang throwing bad guys. He'll ride a mine cart and a boat as well.

UFOURIA: THE SAGA
PUBLISHER: Sunsoft.
DEVELOPER: Sunsoft.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer; 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.
Guide Bop-Louie through caves, the great outdoors, and even underwater in this platforming adventure. The levels are interconnected (à la *Blaster Master* and *Metroid*), with Bop-Louie exploring areas as well as hopping on and throwing balls at enemies. As you progress you will find three of Bop-Louie's friends, each of whom becomes a controllable character with special abilities, such as diving, jumping extra high, or walking on ice. You can walk on walls as well.

© OTHER PUBLISHING

Appendix 2
HES-Exclusive NES Games

This list features games released by Australian company HES (Home Entertainment Suppliers) that were exclusive to Australia.

4 IN 1 FUNBLASTER PAK
PUBLISHER: HES.
DEVELOPER: Thin Chen/Joy Van.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Game Compilation; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.
Compilation cart featuring four previously released games: *Pipemania*, *Twin Eagle*, *Metal Fighter*, and *Little Red Hood*.

4 IN 1 MINDBLOWER PAK
PUBLISHER: HES.
DEVELOPER: Thin Chen/Joy Van.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Game Compilation; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.
Compilation cart featuring three previously released games: *Jackpot*, *Arctic Adventure*, and *Galactic Crusader*, along with one original title, *Math Quiz* (a.k.a. *Magic Mathematic*). In *Math Quiz* you race against the clock to solve arithmetic problems.

4 IN 1 TOTAL FUNPAK
PUBLISHER: HES.
DEVELOPER: Joy Van/Bit Corporation/Namco.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Game Compilation; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1990.
Compilation cart featuring four previously released games: *Pac-Man*, *Sidewinder*, *Duck Maze*, and *Othello*.

6 IN 1 REAL PLAYER'S PACK
PUBLISHER: HES.
DEVELOPER: NTDEC/Mega Soft.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Game Compilation; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.
Like *6 in 1* by Caltron, this compilation cart features the following games: *Cosmos Cop*, *Magic Carpet 1001*, *Balloon Monster*, *Adam and Eve*, *Porter*, and *Bookyman*.

ARTIC ADVENTURE: THE PENGUIN & SEAL
PUBLISHER: HES.
DEVELOPER: Thin Chen/Joy Van.
GAME TYPE: Action/Maze; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1990.
Guide a penguin as he gathers a trio of gems and deposits them into an igloo positioned on the right side of the block-filled, single-screen, nonscrolling playfield. You can push the blocks to destroy them, as well as to defeat seals that roam around getting in your way. The game is similar to the arcade classic *Pengo*, but it includes a construction mode.

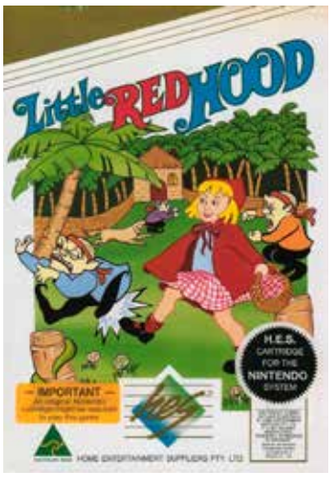
DUCK MAZE
PUBLISHER: HES.
DEVELOPER: Bit Corporation.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Platformer; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1990.
Guide a duck as he works his way down platforms composed of brick floors, dodging rats, cats, and obstacles while rolling an egg toward the exit of each stage. Frequently the duck will need to break a block to advance the egg to the level below the one he is standing on. Be careful not to break the egg.

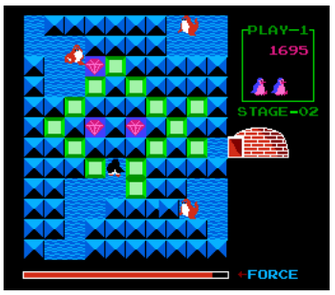
JACKPOT
PUBLISHER: HES.
DEVELOPER: Thin Chen/Joy Van.
GAME TYPE: Gambling; 1 player.
YEAR: 1990.
A simple gambling sim, *Jackpot* gives you 1,000 credits to use on a single slot machine featuring such symbols as stars, melons, cherries, 7s, and BAR symbols. You win a spin by matching rows and columns. The dollar amount you win depends on which trio of symbols you match.

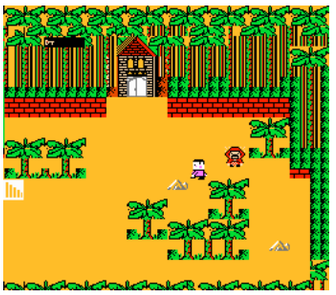
LITTLE RED HOOD
PUBLISHER: HES.
DEVELOPER: Thin Chen/Joy Van.
GAME TYPE: Top-Down Action; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1989.
Loosely based on the *Little Red Riding Hood* fable, *Little Red Hood* has you guiding Red around different types of forest areas (as well as underground), dodging such enemies as goblins, hedgehogs, and snakes. You can kick trees to release fruit. By collecting enough fruit you will make the exit/staircase appear to allow entry to the next area. You will need to get keys to progress as well.

OTHELLO
PUBLISHER: HES.
DEVELOPER: Bit Corporation.
GAME TYPE: Board Game; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1988.
Play *Reversi* against a friend or the computer player (primary, medium, and senior difficulty levels) in this turn-based strategy board game. This version is different than the standard NES release of *Othello*, as it features cartoonish characters and more colorful graphics. A man is depicted smoking during the selection screen, which is odd for an 8-bit title.

PIPEMANIA
PUBLISHER: HES.
DEVELOPER: Thin Chen/Joy Van.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle; 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1991.
Similar to *Pipe Dream*, *Pipemania* has players fitting together different types of pipe to keep water flowing through said pipes and ultimately to a goal. The straight pipes, curving pipes, and crossover pipes you maneuver on the grid playing field basically act as puzzle pieces. A window at the top left of the screen shows you which pipes are coming next.







SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

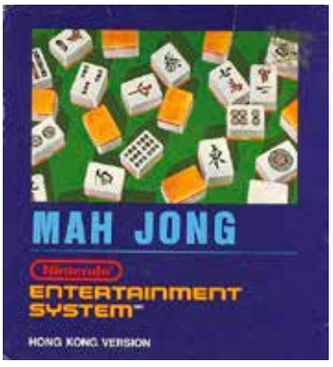
Appendix 3
Miscellaneous NES Games Not Listed Elsewhere in This Book

MAH JONG
PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo.
GAME TYPE: Board Game/Puzzle; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1985.
A Japanese version of the traditional Chinese board game Mahjong, *Mah Jong* was originally a Famicom game. It was then ported to the NES, but only in Hong Kong. This tile puzzler features three difficulty levels and is very hard to find. The objective of the game is to form a complete hand of tiles before your opponent, and before the tile stack is empty.

NINTENDO CAMPUS CHALLENGE 1991
PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo/Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Pinball/Action Puzzle; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.
There is only one example of this competition cart known to exist. As you might expect by the title, it was produced for a series of Campus Challenge events sponsored by Nintendo. The following ad for the Nintendo Campus Challenge, which was held at around 60 locations in North America, was printed in *Game Players Strategy Guide to Nintendo Games* Vol. 4, issue #5:

> Ok, you should really be studying for that calculus test next week. And there's a paper due in English Lit. But who cares? The Nintendo Campus Challenge is coming! Nintendo of America is following up its hugely successful Nintendo World Champions with its first Nintendo Campus Challenge. During the next year, competitions will be held at 50 universities and popular spring break gatherings throughout the U.S. One lucky student will become the "college valedictorian of video games." Contestants will play a special combination of three Nintendo games—*Dr. Mario*, *Rad Racer*, and *Super Mario Bros. 3*. There are categories for both men and women, and all finalists receive round-trip airfare to the January 1992 championship. Prizes include new cars and cash scholarships. Meanwhile, don't let those grades slide too badly.
>
> Prior to the event, *Pin Bot* replaced *Rad Racer*. In the competition, gamers had 6 minutes and 21 seconds to play a trio of minigame versions of classic NES titles: collect 25 coins in *Super Mario Bros. 3*, score 100,000 points in *Pin Bot*, and play *Dr. Mario* until time expires. Each player's score was determined by adding the three scores together based on the following calculation: the *Super Mario Bros. 3* score multiplied by 10, plus the *Pin Bot* score, plus the Dr. Mario score multiplied by 100.

RACERMATE CHALLENGE II
PUBLISHER: Racermate.
DEVELOPER: Racermate.
GAME TYPE: Exercise/Sports/Bicycling; 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.
Unlicensed and ultrarare, *Racermate Challenge II* is a bicycle simulation/training game that was sold packaged with the following items: power supply, controller port interface, bike trainer mount (which you attach to your real bicycle), LCD-mounted handlebars display, cadence sensor, and earclip heart race sensor. In addition to racing against the computer or another player on various built-in courses, you can create your own tracks. Along with the cyclists, which are viewed from behind, the screen displays such readouts as mph, rpm, watts, and wind.



SCANLINE PUBLISHING

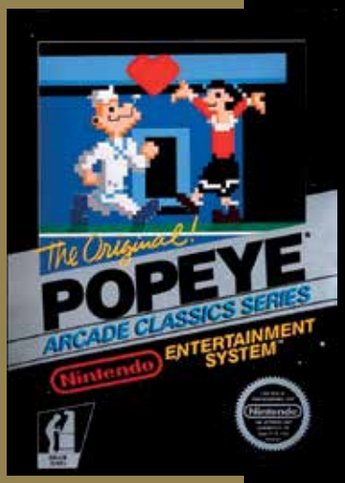
SPECIAL THANKS
TO KICKSTARTER BACKERS AND EARLY BOOK SUPPORTERS

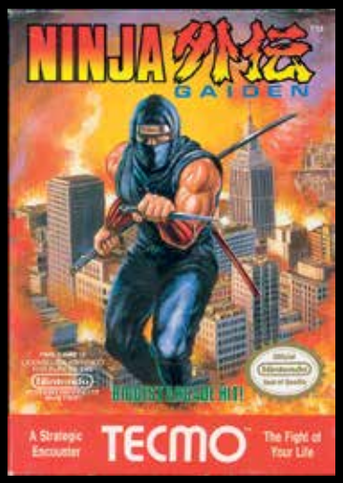
Brian Aga
Matt Agee
Jason Takashi Allen
Salem AlSalem (OowoO) (Kuwait)
Robb Alvey
Eugenio Angueira
Rodrigo Atherino
Jason B.
Bacon Ice Cream Productions
Derek J. Baker
Joshua Baker
Will Ball
Scott Barrett
Steven M. Basile Jr.
Gaetano V Battaglia
Daniel R. Bauer
Joseph Bayer
Shawn Beard
Scott Bearup
Dan Berends
Jimmy Bertelsen
Sean Beyer
Justin Bieber
Holly Blakemore
Joshua Bock
Casey Boden
Brian R. Bondurant
Keith Borgholthaus
Laura L Brant
Jeffery Bray
Larry Bright
Scott “Skackle” Brown
Joe Brumfield
BryanX 64
Frank Winfield Bunker
S. Busby
Jason C. Bycroft
Marc Camron
Asa Canaday
James ‘Loose’ Cannon
Greg Carr
Heath Chamerski
Douglas Childs
Chris
Nick Christman
Vince Ciolino
Scott Collins
Leif “Eightywithout” Conti-Groome
Jennifer Cooper
Mike Corcoran
Jason Crase
Esko Cruzeta
Cindy Curtis
Crystal Lake Management
Gavin Dalton
John JC Danko
Mike Darrow
Billy Daughtrey
Travis J Davis
Alexis Delgado
Lucas Dietz
Corey Doss
Michael Dougherty
Jesse Eastman
Mark Elzik
Tyler Evans
Shane Falibota
Fastback
Nick Feeney
Addison Ferguson
Mark Flemmich
Dave Forman
Todd Friedman
Jason ‘XenoPhage’ Frisvold
John Furby
Scott R Gagnon
Christopher Galbreath
GameHeadZA
Gary
David Gasparic
Chris Glodde
Ryan SuperNikoPower Goddard
Adam F. Goldberg
Richard E Green
David Guiot
Randall J. Gunter
Riley Hagan
Allan Hall
Brian Hall (bhall408)
Jeff Hanson
Gene Harlow
John P Harrod IV
Brian Hart
He-Zin & Steve
Peter Harriman
Andrew Herrnreiter
Hief
Jason Hink
Jacob Hinrichsen
Bennie Hooker
Joe Hollowell
Ken Horowitz
Gamemaster Howard
David Huber
Tyler Hughey
iam8bit
Jeroen Iking
David “Ty” Ingram
Michael Isbitski
David Isherwood
Jonas Jacobsson
Joshera
Randall Joyal
Alexander Kaltsas
Thomas Kaminski
Kel & Cata
Rick Kelsey
Matt Kerntke
Micah Keyan
Neil Khambhaita
Brad Kilgore
Michael Kirk
Paul Koerber
Lisa Komadina
Marc Lafontaine
Brian Lesyk
Lancetastick
Richard Latronica (Thirdeyeopen23)
Nick Lavelle
Nathan S Laws
Chris Leathco
Jorge “Citrik” Leyva
Christoph Licht
Ed Lokuta
Steve Ludwig
Jason M.
John MacMillan
DJ Mangus
Jason N. Manley
Johnny Marrero
Dennis Mathews
Erica McCowan
Jeff “gogamego” McGraw
Delf Meek
Luke Meier
Jorge Mendonca
Kale Menges

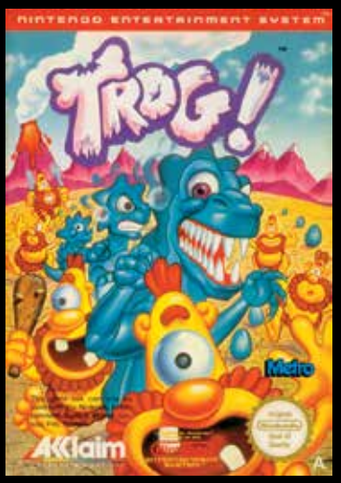
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

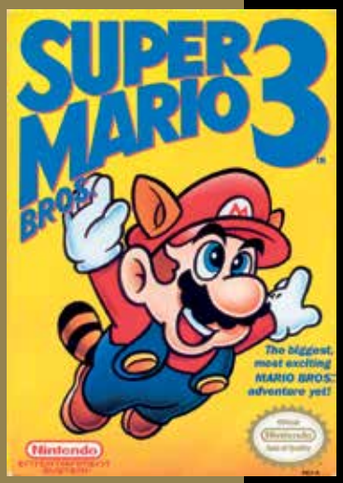
Anthony Micari
Christopher Mikutel
Christopher J. Miles
Matt Miller
Steve Mizia
Darren Moffatt
Sandy Mohler
John “MooseCantTalk” Moody
Keith Murphy
Kevin Nickel
Pete Nowell
Russell Nunnelee
Obliterator918
John O’Connell
Cha O’Connor
Joshua Olson
David Olstein
Ezra Oreshoski
Rob Paine
Papa Pete the Old Guy Gamer
Anthony Parra
Tatton Partington
James Pate
Matt Patterson
Fabrizio Pedrazzini
Glenn Peffers
Andrew “Immoral Flame” Perea
Russ Perry Jr
Sergio Enrique Peruyera
Bruno Pešec
Heath Phillips
James Phillips
Nico Pizzella
Tyler M. Poelstra
James Pope
John Pope
Matthew Pordes
Sean Powers
Ash Preheim
Kris Pyrz
In Loving Memory of
Adelaide Mae Ramsdell, 2014-2018
Matt Rasmussen
Hannah Read
Douglas Rensch
Shane Reulet
Rick Reynolds
Nick Richards
Brandon Riley
César Augusto Rivera
Michael Roper
Marc Rouleau
Malachi Dean Royer
Kenny Ryan
Joe Saar
Christy Salamon
Alex San Juan
Brian Sands
Abhilash Sarhadi
Scott Saunders
Schenley
Seiromem
Shervyn
Jeremy Shirley
SkoveDog
Kevin Smale
Bradford N. Smith
Jobey Smith
Jason Smith
Max Pixley Smith
George Spanos
Brian “Muddy” Stark. LAV
Shane Stein
Darren Sulfridge
David Sundrud
Supercade
Justin T
Albert Tahan
Tommy Tallarico
Randy Tanigawa
John Thomas
Johnny Thompson
Blake Thorne
Heath Tollett
John Trenbeath
Brandon Valenzio
Chris Vanderhoef
Jamie Vann
VBD Productions
VGMaps.com: The Video Game Atlas
Mario Villanueva
Quang Vo
Thomas Walch
Jonathan J Walker
Bryan Walman
David Warhol
Brian Weisberg
Craig Weston
Michael Whipp
Chris Whitaker
Christopher Wiford
Greg Wilcox
James A. Wilkinson R.S.E.
Adam Yeager
Mike Yesenko
Zachariah and John Paul Zahary
William E. Zientara
@0xe1f
34k

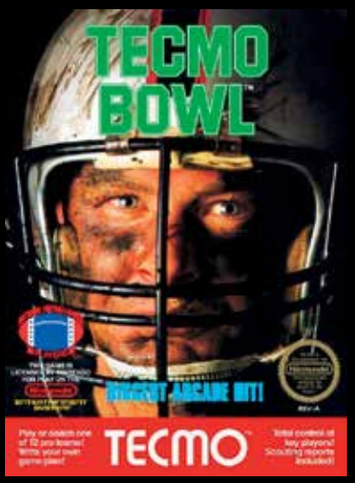
SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

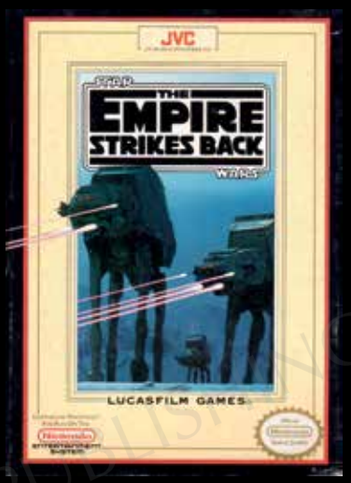


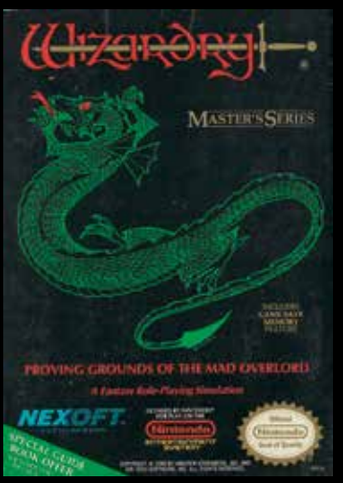


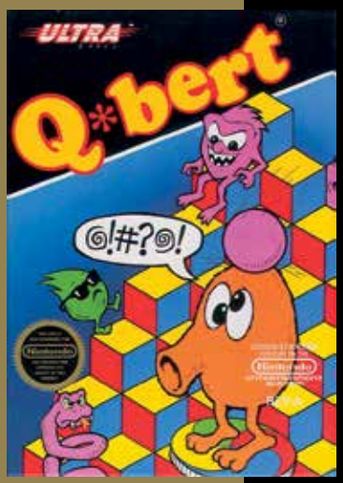


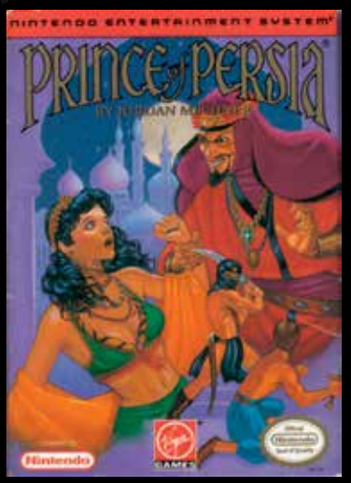


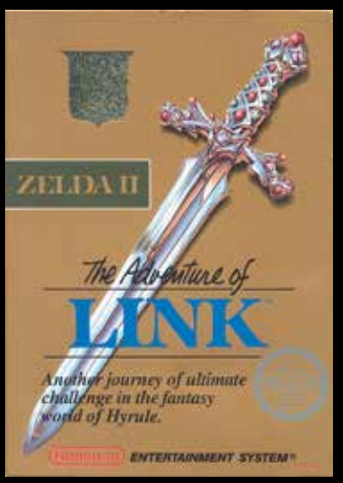




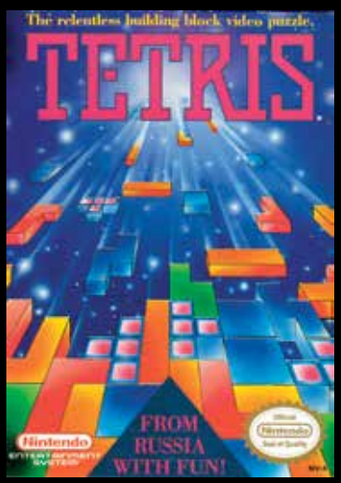








MORE THAN 360 NES GAMES ARE DESCRIBED AND REVIEWED IN GREAT DETAIL



9 780764 362484 54999
ISBN: 978-0-7643-6248-4 $49.99